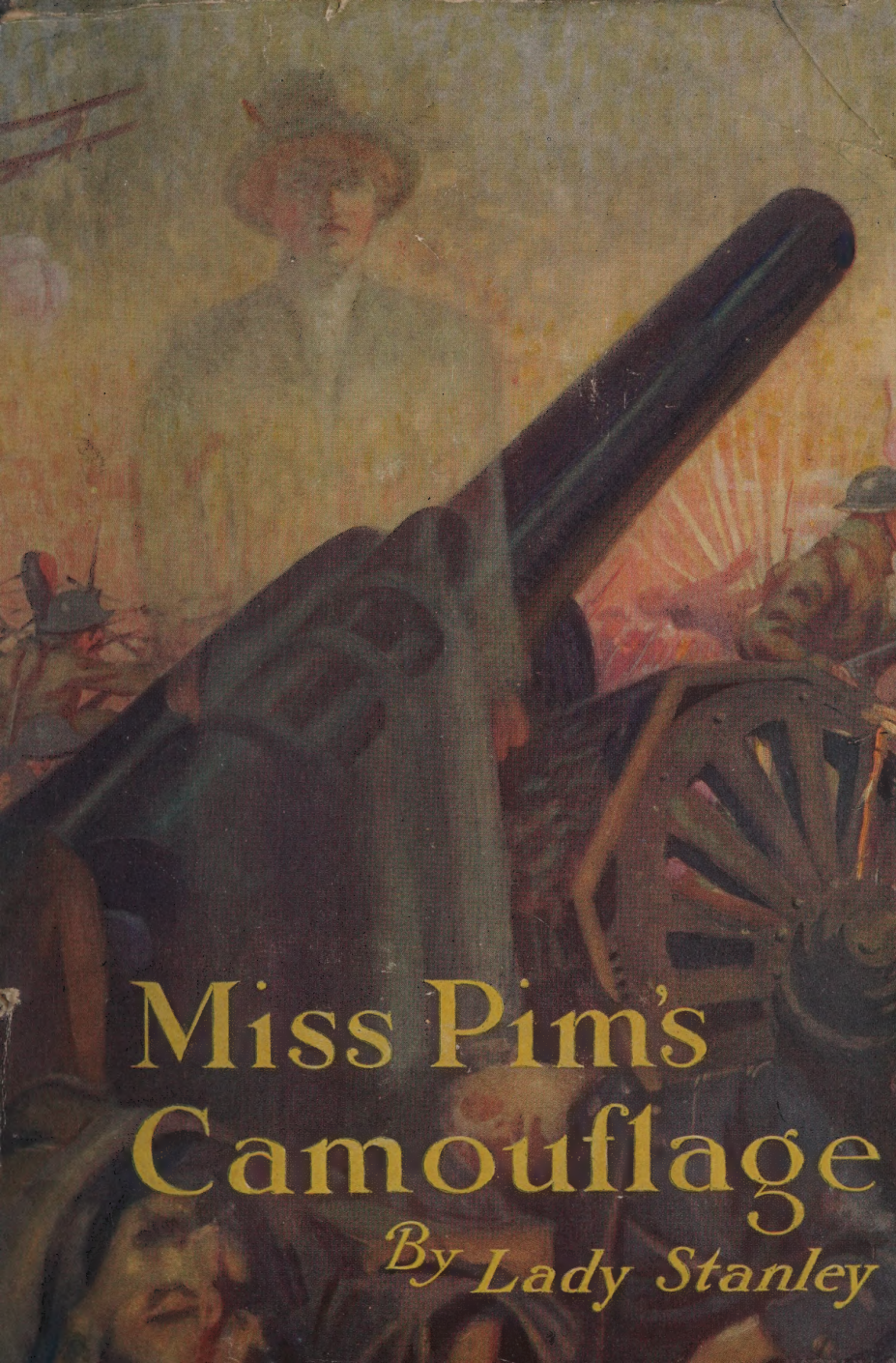
Miss Pim's
Camouflage
By Lady Stanley

MISS PIM'S CAMOUFLAGE

BY

LADY STANLEY

Miss Pim, a British spinster of fifty, suddenly finds one day that she has a certain marvelous gift. She offers her services to the authorities at the War Office, and is by them sent to the British General Headquarters in France. There, she is commissioned to make a trip through Germany. This she does, and experiences many adventures, culminating in meetings with Hindenburg and with the Kaiser himself. In the end, she succeeds in getting safely back to the English lines with important information, for which she receives the Victoria Cross.

The book is a high-spirited tale of marvelous adventure, written with both vividness and humor, and with a wealth of knowledge of war-time conditions. It belongs in the little group of really absorbing war stories.

Lady Stanley, the author, is one of the best-known women in England, the widow of Sir Henry Stanley, whose Autobiography she edited brilliantly some years ago.

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Miss Pim's Camouflage

Roy Stanley

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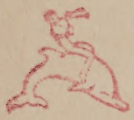
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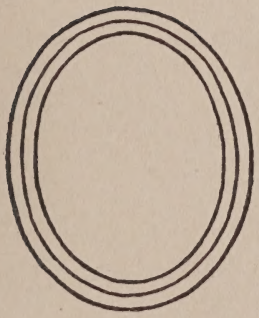

MISS PIM

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MISS PIM'S CAMOUFLAGE

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CHAPTER I

Miss Pim was hurt, — that is how she put it, — very much hurt. After a hard morning's work in the garden, she had taken refuge in a deep easy-chair, in the library, glad to escape the direct rays of a very fervent sun.

Miss Pim liked to call her weeding and hoeing "war-work." The two gardeners had long ago gone to the front: only old Cherryman and an incompetent boy remained. Miss Pim had therefore felt it to be her duty to assist in raising vegetables, and in that way to "help the country," as she put it.

Miss Pim had always prided herself on her patriotism. "I come of a long line of soldiers," she would say, straightening herself. "We even had a General in the family." General Pim had flourished early in the 1700's, but there had been many military Pims since then, though of less exalted rank. Colonel Pim, Perdita Pim's father, had died when she was still a young girl, but she fondly treasured his memory. "I took after my father, the Colonel, whereas George, my brother, was the image of my gentle mother. The Colonel often said to me: 'Purr, you should have

been the boy. George is cut out for a girl; but you would have become another General Pim, and won a V.C.'"

And now! — to hear Lesley, her niece, who was lolling outside in a basket chair, say to the Vicar's son: —

"Oh, Auntie Purr is just a vegetable marrow, — a dear, placid, lazy vegetable marrow, — and I shall become just like her if I keep on living this sheltered country life."

"What plant are you like at present?" asked George Barton tenderly.

"Oh, a stinging nettle!" cried Lesley, jumping up. "Come, let's finish our set before lunch." And away they ran, flinging laughter behind them.

Yes — Perdita Pim was hurt, not to say angry.

Her brother, Major Pim, a widower, had retired from the Army, and lived with his daughter Lesley at Torquay. When war was declared, he hastened to rejoin his old regiment, the house was let, and Lesley came to live at Froghurst Manor with Auntie Purr.

"A vegetable marrow," Miss Pim repeated, looking more like a ripe tomato, as she lay back in the armchair, very hot and ruffled. "Here have I been all the morning weeding the onion bed, working for my country, until I have a curious spinning in my head and my spine positively aches, and that chit of a girl calls me lazy!"

Miss Pim pressed back her head and suddenly felt a curious crick in the neck — "like a slight dislocation," she said to herself. "Ah, well, the onion bed must wait; I cannot go out till after tea, the sun is far too hot."

But Miss Pim never finished that onion bed. Luncheon was ready; the neat parlour maid sounded a carillon on graduated metal tubes. Lesley and the Vicar's son were waiting in the hall for Auntie Purr; but Miss Pim felt strangely disinclined to move, she wanted to get up and change her shoes, smooth her hair, ruffled by her morning labours, but a strange lethargy held her, whether of body or will she could not say. Then Lesley ran in, calling, "Auntie Purr." She looked round and cried, "Where can she be?"

"Here, dear," said Miss Pim, rather faintly.

"Where are you, Auntie?"

"Why, just here," said Miss Pim testily, staring at rosy-cheeked Lesley.

"Playing hide-and-seek, Auntie Purr, and luncheon on the table!"

Miss Pim bade her go to lunch, adding, "I will join you in a few minutes, dear."

Lesley looked round the library bewildered; then she gently closed the door and returned to the dining-room. "Such an odd thing! I have been talking to Auntie Purr in the library and she is n't there!"

"That's an Irish bull," said George Barton.

"No, it is n't; she was hidden out of sight, but she answered me quite — quite naturally."

"Did you expect her to answer unnaturally?"

"No," said Lesley; "but it did seem odd, not to see her."

"Did you go into the room and look round?"

"No; I just stood in the doorway."

"Well, there's nothing very surprising in that. Your aunt was behind the sofa or armchair, packing up something. Are we to wait for lunch?"

"No; she said she would join us." And Lesley sat down, but the puzzled look lingered.

Miss Pim, still feeling "a touch of the sun," slowly went to her room. Her maid had neglected to put hot water there, — "just as though I could do '*war-work*' all the morning and dispense with hot water." She rang, pressing her finger unusually long on the electric bell.

Jane hurried in with the hot water, a guilty flush on her cheek. She looked round and exclaimed, "*There*, now! I could have swore she rang."

"I *did* ring," said Miss Pim severely. "I ought to have found the hot water awaiting me."

Jane stared round the room.

"Here, take my skirt and have it brushed, that onion bed is so sandy." And Miss Pim stepped out

of her neat serge skirt, holding it out to Jane; but Jane stood near the washing-stand, ignoring Miss Pim, her red cheek mottled by pallor, her eyes rolling. "What is the matter, Jane? Here, take this skirt." Miss Pim again held it out, then dropped it on to the floor. Jane snatched it up, and rushed out of the room, leaving Miss Pim disturbed by the girl's foolish behaviour.

Slowly she washed her hands, and then seated herself before the dressing-table, distressed at feeling so tired. "It's quite ridiculous, after all; I only weeded half that onion bed. I cannot think what's come over me. I must hurry down to lunch, and take a little whiskey-and-soda, instead of barley water. Now for my hair; it must be all in wisps." Miss Pim took up her ivory-backed hairbrush and gazed into the large shield-shaped mirror. There she saw reflected the dear familiar room, the pretty chintz-covered couch, the Sheraton bedstead with the blue satin eider-down coverlet spread over the snowy counterpane; she saw white bookshelves laden with treasured volumes of her girlhood; but, terrible to say, she saw no reflection of herself nor of the chair she sat on. Miss Pim rose trembling, clutching the dressing-table; as she rose, the chair appeared in the mirror. Miss Pim turned to the bell; then, remembering Jane's face, she paused and tottered to the chintz-covered couch;

from there her eyes travelled fearfully to the mirror. She could see neither herself nor the couch! This was something altogether beyond Miss Pim's power of conception. Her first thought was self-concealment; then, remembering with a pang she was only too effectually concealed, she walked furtively to the door and locked it. Then, like a stage conspirator, she stole towards a mirror set in the wardrobe, and with clasped hands sought in vain for the well-known reflection of a sandy-haired, rather stout woman of fifty: where were those kindly round greenish eyes, which had met hers ever since she could remember; that small nose she secretly "rather liked"; the friendly mouth, always ready to smile back at her? It was truly appalling: "*for I am in existence*," wailed Miss Pim, searching for her handkerchief, which was in the pocket of her serge skirt. That serge skirt which Jane, at that very time, was brushing and shaking in the sewing-room.

"She spoke just as plain as I now speak to you," said Jane to Bessie, the young housemaid, who sat in the old rocking-chair, cuddling a tortoise-shell kitten. "'Take my skirt,' and there was n't no Miss Pim and no skirt! Then, all of a sudden this skirt drops of itself on the carpet, and there was n't a soul in the room, only a voice, and that Miss Pim's." Bessie giggled and rocked herself. "It's all very fine, your

jeering there, you'd have fainted and had hysterics. All my blood turned, but I kept my 'ed. I picked up this skirt and left the room, shutting the door on *the voice*."

Suddenly Miss Pim's bell "went." The maids looked at each other. "You go, Bessie, my girl, whilst I finish this dress."

Bessie, who was very anxious to see invisibility for herself, ran upstairs. Her heart beat more quickly when she heard "*the voice*"; she knocked and entered. Miss Pim, quite substantial, was lying on the couch.

"Please tell Miss Lesley that I am a little exhausted by the heat, and therefore I shall not come down to lunch; and tell Mr. Barton that I should be much obliged if, after lunch, he would ask his father to call on me; I must see him on very particular business."

Miss Pim had recovered her visibility: lying back on the couch and stretching back her head, she had felt a slight dislocating jar, and reappeared; but the experience had been too solemn and dreadful to bear all alone. She must confide in the Vicar, a holy man, who could tell her if this disappearance was what is called "being possessed"; possibly he could suggest some form of exorcism, "if you *can* exorcise something which is n't there," thought Miss Pim.

Very slowly and timidly she made her way down

to the library, as though she might, by some unexpected movement, cause her re-disappearance.

Lesley came running to her in unfeigned concern: "Oh, Auntie Purr, you are not ill? It's that horrid gardening in a broiling sun. I am sure it was too much for you. Do go and lie down."

"I feel quite myself now, dear," said Miss Pim. "I shall leave off gardening for to-day, and sit here; I have plenty to do, all the penny club accounts, and the book catalogue, but I want to see the Vicar; I have some — some business to talk over with him."

"Yes; George has run over to tell his father. Do have an early tea, Auntie Purr. Lie back in your chair and read some of the books that came yesterday from the library."

"Perhaps I will," said Miss Pim faintly. She had not recovered from the shock, and really felt incapable of adding up school pennies, or cataloguing books of the school lending library.

She lay there in the large leather armchair, where Colonel Pim used to sit smoking, long ago in those "laughing days." She recalled his tender look, when he called her his "little General Pim, V.C."; "and here I am, cowardly as a rabbit, without nerve enough to face the housemaid!" But then, she remembered, it was *because* she could *not* face herself, or any one else, that she had been so upset. "What is better than

presence of mind?" — "Absence of body." The silly old riddle recurred to her. Absence of body! That was just it, the most blood-freezing experience any one could have. She might have thought it a delusion, a brain attack caused by the sun; but Lesley had not seen her, when she sat there, and Jane nearly had a fit when she spoke to her. No; it was a fact. Miss Pim could not deceive herself; she had, for an appreciable time, become invisible, and it was very important that no one should know it, — no one but the dear Vicar, who could be trusted to keep it a secret.

CHAPTER II

"My dear Miss Pim, I hope nothing is amiss," cried the Reverend Eustace Barton, entering the library. "I am delighted to see you; in fact, I had promised myself the pleasure of a visit to Froghurst Manor to-day; we have a great deal to talk over, have we not? Those two dear young people — so devoted — so —"

"Oh, Mr. Barton, Mr. Barton, — there is or has been something very much amiss, and I feel I must tell you, just you and only you."

Then Miss Pim recounted her strange experience. The Vicar, a very solid, sensible country gentleman, with a legal-looking face, keen kindly eyes, and close-cropped grey hair, listened patiently to Miss Pim; he liked and greatly respected her, and her story gave him pain. "Such a sensible woman, too; the very last woman one would have thought to give way to delusions."

"Well?" said Miss Pim, anxiously looking at him; "you are silent? Speak, tell me what it all means." Miss Pim drew out her handkerchief.

The Vicar looked steadily at Miss Pim.

"You really want my opinion? Well, send for

Dr. Mulready, or go to London and see a good man; perhaps that would be better, Mulready is rather a gossip. Take a holiday, my dear Miss Pim; you are run down. Oh, we shall miss you in the Parish, but we must n't be greedy. Go away and rest. *Rest*," he said, almost fiercely, keeping a quelling eye upon her, as much as to say, "Disappear, now, if you dare!"

Miss Pim was shocked. "So, then, you do not believe me? Of course, I ought to have realised that it does seem unbelievable. I would n't have believed you, I suppose, if you had told me that story."

"I don't in the least *blame* you, Miss Pim; you just can't help it. All you must do is to get rest and complete change of scene."

"But *it is true*, my dear Vicar. I wish with all my heart and soul I were mistaken. If *it* returns, what am I to do? It may never return, but — if I again become — invisible — tell me" — and here her voice broke, — "tell me what to do."

The Reverend Eustace Barton felt annoyed. He was a very matter-of-fact, sensible man; he felt he could solve most problems, and was ready and willing to settle the worldly and spiritual affairs of each one of his parishioners; but to sit and talk nonsense with Miss Pim was exceedingly distasteful to him. His son was engaged to her niece, and if Miss Pim's mind was failing, he should seriously object to his

son marrying into the family. Mr. Barton's face took on his most severe, legal look.

"I have a good deal of work, especially to-day," he began, looking fixedly at Miss Pim, "and if there is nothing else you wish to talk of, I think I must go."

A curious feeling of triumph now came over Miss Pim: the Vicar was in her power; he doubted her word, or her sanity; it rested with her to convince him; she would share the dreadful secret with him. Seeing is believing, but this was a case of *not* seeing in order to believe. Yes, Miss Pim had an unmistakable glint of triumph in her eyes. She leant forward in her chair and spoke with measured solemnity.

"Mr. Barton, one moment, if you please; look at me fixedly. It is necessary that I should disappear; only remember, I am there all the time. Now!" And Miss Pim leant back, stiffened her neck, her kindly face took on a strained, anxious expression, and she disappeared! And the chair she sat in also disappeared!

To say that the good Vicar was astonished would be a feeble way of putting it. He felt physical insecurity, he stepped back cautiously, clutching the back of his chair, as though he expected to be swept away, with Miss Pim, into nothingness.

"Can you see me?" said her voice.

"No, no, I do not," cried the Vicar, very nervously.

"Now, Mr. Barton, please come forward and take my hand, I am reaching it out to you," continued Miss Pim.

Mr. Barton, greatly disturbed, groped his way to the invisible lady, starting violently when he felt a hand on his coat sleeve.

"There, now, stop; put your hand on my shoulder, follow up my arm; there, now; you see I am here, sitting in the armchair."

"No, I don't see; that is, I don't understand."

"Just so," burst in Miss Pim, "neither do I understand. In fact, I should not know that I am invisible. Has the chair gone also?" she enquired anxiously.

"You and the chair are — out of sight," gasped the Vicar.

"Well, go back to your seat, and I will reappear. It is difficult to carry on a connected conversation knowing yourself to be invisible; it is awkward, and if any one came in, it would seem as though you had been talking to yourself."

Mr. Barton tiptoed backwards to his chair, feeling very hot and upset. He carefully dabbed his forehead and the back of his neck with his handkerchief.

Then suddenly Miss Pim was there, and her eyes said, "I told you so," triumphantly. But the triumph soon gave place to a very real look of sorrow.

"Oh, tell me, is this an evil possession, the work of — of Satan. Dear Vicar, have I — a — a — devil?"

But the Reverend Mr. Barton had recovered himself; here was a wonderful phenomenon undoubtedly, and it was for him to consider it and advise.

"I don't think it is reasonable to put down to — the Evil One what we cannot explain. My dear Miss Pim, this new — faculty — you have suddenly become possessed of is amazing and mysterious, but we need not associate it with evil. You say it occurred for the first time to-day. And so everything you touch disappears?"

"Yes, it is awfully — extraordinary; and no one would believe it, simply from reading or hearing about it; it is unbelievable."

"It is n't a malady, for you do not look ill; it's — it's just miraculous."

"But, all the same, it is very dreadful," groaned Miss Pim. "I have attended church regularly, and been to most of your week-day services. I have worked hard to produce food in the garden, I have done all the club accounts, I have —" and here Miss Pim buried her full round face in her ample handkerchief.

Mr. Barton moved impatiently. "But you appear to persist in believing this mysterious power is evil, and if not a power for evil, at any rate, a punishment for some imaginary sin. I do not share your view of it; I have quite a different opinion about it."

Miss Pim looked up; her middle-aged face wore a very young, a quite childlike expression of surprise, interest, and hope.

"Yes; a very different answer to the enigma presents itself to me," continued the Vicar, who was now quite at his ease. He had been called on for help and advice; he was ready as ever to give both. At first he was taken aback, but every problem has its solution, and the Reverend Eustace Barton was ready now to give Miss Pim what she sought. Hungry sheep never looked up to him in vain — he fed them.

"This — er — this faculty of becoming invisible I consider a distinct *call*. Yes, a call to your patriotism. Something great is expected of you. You are to dedicate this — er — gift — to your country."

Miss Pim's feelings were mingled; astonishment and exaltation combined rendered her speechless. She kept her eyes fixed on the Vicar, her mouth slightly opened.

"Yes," continued the Reverend Mr. Barton; "this power has been conferred on you for some high purpose. I cannot tell you how it should be utilised;

experts must decide. What you have to do, and that without delay, is to go up to London and offer yourself to the War Office." Miss Pim gasped. "Oh, yes! I know the difficulties, but we are more intelligent at the War Office than we were," continued the worthy Vicar, waving his hand; "a new idea has some chance of — er — gaining admittance there. You must go to the War Office at once." And Mr. Barton looked rather fierce, as though Miss Pim required coercion.

"But what can I do at the War Office?" said Miss Pim helplessly.

"Disappear, of course," said Mr. Barton, settling his clerical collar, and straightening his clerical waistcoat.

"But disappearing will not impress — officers," said Miss Pim feebly, feeling an hysterical inclination to giggle.

Mr. Barton looked his sternest. "They'll *have* to be impressed; you must disappear before Sir Robert Williamson himself. I'll tell you what, Miss Pim. I will accompany you, to-morrow, to the War Office. My nephew, invalided from the front, is working there; we'll start with him."

"But I do not understand, in the very least, what you expect of me; what would be expected of me?"

"*That* I cannot tell you — er — my dear lady; you must simply show your patriotism by offering your

unique services to your country. Remember — er — that a soldier's eye is on you," said the Vicar dramatically, pointing to General Pim, a pale-faced man in a peruke, with very dark eyes.

The portrait in pastel had faded in the sunshine of some one hundred and twenty summers. The red coat had become pink, the flesh tints were bleached; only the eyes remained vivid and dark, staring back at whoever stared into their depths. Miss Pim clasped her hands as she gazed at her pale ancestor, and then and there dedicated herself to her country, making her silent vows with closed eyes.

"To-morrow, by the 10.18 express, we'll meet at the station," she heard the Vicar say; "and now, I must really hurry away, to make arrangements." And Miss Pim was alone.

It would be difficult to convey to the reader that good lady's feelings. Confused they certainly were; courageous, exalted, and nevertheless timid. Perhaps we shall best sum up Miss Pim's state of mind by saying that she was exceedingly anxious to do her duty and to show her patriotism. It cannot be denied that she would have preferred to show it in weeding the kitchen garden, but Mr. Barton had shown her a better way, and she would follow it.

CHAPTER III

Lesley thought her aunt's visit to London very odd and unexpected. "Perhaps she is going up to see a doctor, poor dear, and does not want me to know."

She was confirmed in this surmise, when Auntie Purr refused Lesley's escort, in an embarrassed way. "No, my dear; I have some private business, or I should rather say public business, to attend to, — not exactly public, not at present. I am sure it should be considered confidential business, — something which concerns me," said Miss Pim, confused.

"It sounds as though you were eloping — to a registry office," laughed Lesley; "going off, perhaps, with the Vicar."

Miss Pim blushed as red as an Oriental poppy — Lesley was very "teasing," she thought; and when it became known that Mr. Barton had accompanied her to town, Lesley would tease her aunt still more.

Miss Pim resolved to keep her own counsel, however, and allow matters to mature. "I can always explain later on," she said to herself. But she did not feel easy till she sat in the 10.18 express and was off on her non-stop journey to town.

Mr. Barton's presence was very reassuring. He managed to make her feel that "disappearing" was,

if not quite a normal occurrence, at any rate, something natural, a special gift, like ventriloquism, or the phenomenal calculating powers of so-called prodigies.

Mr. Barton was so "balanced" and "sane"; she felt steadied by his kindly presence. And Mr. Barton was immensely enjoying himself. He knew he was offering a prodigy to the War Office, and that but for him all the potentialities of this amazing discovery would have been lost.

Lieutenant Ellis, at the War Office, came down to his uncle, in the big waiting-room. He was a thoroughly good fellow, and though he was bored by his uncle, he never showed it. He greeted Miss Pim just as though she were eighteen, remarkably pretty, wore high heels and silk stockings, morning *décolletage*, and a fetching hat. Mr. Barton took him aside and in a low voice told him of Miss Pim's miraculous power and how it was *absolutely* necessary to secure an interview with Sir Robert Williamson.

Lieutenant Ellis looked, his uncle thought, uncommonly stupid. "Oh, I say! But I never see Sir Robert; I can't approach him."

"But there are others who can. Look here, Bertie, you must get us into a private room, and bring some War Office bigwigs,—a Colonel or two and a General,— and Miss Pim will disappear."

Bertie grinned; then he thought rapidly. He knew a jolly Colonel in one Department who would think it tremendous sport, and two other pals, who might pass as Colonels; anyhow, it would all be screamingly funny. He'd risk it.

"Uncle," he said, "I'm your man; follow me."

"Miss Pim, will you step this way." Solemnly they mounted a broad stone staircase, and were ushered into a small room.

The cells of officials, I am convinced, have a great deal to do with shaping the official mind and manner. And why not? We know that ordinary bees' eggs laid in a particular cell produce royal bees; if bees put their eggs in official cells they would produce official bees; that is to say, bees with enlarged heads and diminished brain power.

Bertie Ellis was less official than many, and this was his uncle. Besides, it was not far from the luncheon hour, and he was to meet at a delightful restaurant a delightful girl who worked at the Admiralty and wore the newest, smartest frocks. So Bertie was not quite so official that day; he was still a human being. He left Miss Pim and his uncle to fetch his friends, and soon returned with three very correct young officers in faultless khaki, and a stout, jolly colonel with a very red face. Mr. Barton then made a short address about Miss Pim, in rather a

showman-like way. The three young lieutenants made really convulsive efforts to keep a War Office demeanour, almost breaking down when Mr. Barton said, "I will now ask Miss Pim to seat herself in the middle of the room and disappear."

"Not on the floor," said the gallant Colonel, hastening forward with a large office chair.

"Certainly *not* on the floor," replied the Vicar severely. "Miss Pim, please be seated."

Miss Pim, very pale and nervous, looked at her audience; two of the younger men had pressed their handkerchiefs to their lips. With sorrowful dignity Miss Pim sat down, leant back in her chair, and disappeared, chair and all.

There was a deep silence, broken by Mr. Barton. "Will you speak, Miss Pim, to show you are here amidst us, though invisible." Mr. Barton spoke exactly as people do at spiritualist seances.

"Yes, I am here, and everything appears to me just the same," said Miss Pim's voice.

"Will you now be good enough to rise, and shake hands with the Colonel," ordered Mr. Barton.

The Colonel backed behind the table. "Oh, I say! Choose one of the young 'uns," he cried. But Miss Pim had him by the hand before he could escape from the room, and every officer found himself in succession shaking hands with "something."

Just then the door opened and a lean, old staff officer walked in with a bundle of papers.

Bertie jumped up. "Sir, excuse me, Sir, but there is something awfully strange going on. You ought to know. Sir Robert Williamson ought to know. By Jove, Sir, it's lucky you came. I — I should n't have dared to ask you to come," said Bertie boyishly.

The officer looked at him kindly with shrewd eyes. "Perhaps you will introduce me to your reverend friend, and then explain. But you must make it short; you know how pressed I am."

"Sir Hector Russell — my uncle — Mr. Barton, Vicar of Froghurst."

At the great name of Hector Russell, Miss Pim felt faint, and wished she might remain invisible, so great was her emotion. The Vicar then briefly explained the case, dropping his rather portentous manner. Sir Hector listened acutely; it really is the best way to describe his keen, intense attitude. Then in a very gentle, quiet way he asked, "And the lady, you say, is here in this room?"

"Miss Pim, please to reappear," said the Vicar, rather tremulously.

And Miss Pim became visible, seated on the chair in the middle of the office. Sir Hector stood before her, silent, as though in a trance; then, looking at Miss Pim reassuringly, he put out his hand.

"This is very wonderful, almost unnerving; it is quite extraordinarily kind of you coming to us." Then turning to the officers, he said, "Gentlemen, not a word of this to any one, in the War Office or outside — that must clearly be understood." The Colonel and the Lieutenants murmured their acquiescence. "And here are the papers, Colonel, to look at when you get time. Gentlemen, I will not detain you." And the door closed, leaving Sir Hector with the Vicar and Miss Pim.

"Of course Sir Robert Williamson must meet you; he is in Committee now, but it would be better for him to see you away from here. What do you say to our motoring out to Froghurst on Sunday afternoon, and you could give us a cup of tea?"

Sir Hector asked this so easily, in such a friendly way, Miss Pim felt quite reassured. Sir Hector then begged her to observe the greatest secrecy about it — not to let any one know of this extraordinary power, and not to publish the visit of Sir Robert Williamson and himself. Miss Pim assured him of her discretion, and Sir Hector escorted her and Mr. Barton to the great hall below.

CHAPTER IV

Miss Pim awaited that Sunday in a fever of expectancy. When she told her niece that Sir Robert Williamson and Sir Hector Russell were motoring over to tea the following Sunday, and that she and the Vicar must see them in absolute privacy, Lesley could not conceal her chagrin. "But George is in the West Surreys; surely he may meet the Generals! Why, they could make him a Captain or even a Major right away."

"No; I am afraid George cannot be there," said Miss Pim; "but possibly, after our interview, you could give them tea in the drawing-room."

Lesley pouted: "It is so strange, their coming at all; and why should they want to see *you*, Auntie Purr?"

"It is about war-work. I may even have to go to France; you see, dear, I am not quite a vegetable marrow," said Miss Pim, rather maliciously.

Lesley coloured up. Her aunt doing war-work in France! Why, Miss Pim had never learnt nursing, she had not even done V.A.D. work, whereas Lesley had cleaned brasswork in the Torquay Hospital for quite three months. Still, George's father would see

the great Generals, and he might persuade them to give her fiancé promotion right away. Otherwise George might remain Second Lieutenant to the end.

The library was "turned out" and all the furniture was extra polished. On Saturday Miss Pim herself drove old Bobbie to the station and returned to the Manor with the leading morning papers, "The Graphic," and "The Illustrated News," "The Sphere," "The Sketch," "The Tatler," "Land and Water," "Cornhill," and "Blackwood." These were ranged on the large library table with the silver-handled ivory paper-knife. Three war maps were fastened upon the walls. George Barton had been deputed to get the cigarettes and cigars. The late Colonel Pim's silver cigar and cigarette box was got out and polished by Miss Pim herself.

That memorable Sunday in July was a most depressing day; rain and hail beat against the windows. Miss Pim thought such weather would surely deter her expected visitors. When Mr. Barton walked in, she was so nervous she fairly jumped, and yet, when a little later the two officers appeared, all her calm had returned, and she welcomed Sir Hector as an old friend. Sir Robert was thicker and sturdier, and the strangely winning smile of Sir Hector was absent, but he looked powerful and steady-eyed; there

was something dauntless about that man which awed Miss Pim.

Readily she passed from the substantial to the invisible, standing or sitting. Sir Robert handed her different articles; these in turn became invisible. He asked her to touch a chair; it disappeared, but when she touched the big table only the part near her disappeared. Sir Robert made rapid remarks to Sir Hector in a low voice. The Vicar took no part; he tactfully stood aside, and left the great Generals to discuss their ideas together, whilst General Pim, who had done with war, looked down on them with pale aloofness.

"Well, Miss Pim, are you really willing to help us?" asked Sir Hector pleasantly. "Sir Robert and I have decided that you might do very valuable work."

"Yes, I am quite at your service," said Miss Pim; "but, gentlemen, have you taken into account my limitations?"

"We have," said Sir Robert, rather curtly, "and we want to know the extent. Do you speak German?"

"Oh, yes; I talk German and French quite fluently," replied Perdita Pim, blushing; "but of course I do not understand military terms, but I could study military German from textbooks."

"Ah, well; there 's no doubt you could be of great use," said Sir Hector cheerfully. "I suppose you

understand that we shall want you to go into the enemy's lines, and also we shall want reports on Germany and the German state of mind?"

"When can you start?" interposed Sir Robert abruptly.

Miss Pim looked round at the Vicar. "When?" she repeated vaguely. "Oh, when do you propose my going?"

"At once. Just time to get a reply from the Commander-in-Chief out there."

"I think," gently interposed Mr. Barton, "it might be as well not to specify Miss Pim's peculiar — er — gift or power. You might say that you are sending Miss Pim to Headquarters, as you and Sir Hector have reason to believe she could be of great assistance, and what that assistance would be Sir Hugh Douglas and his Staff could best decide after meeting Miss Pim."

"Excellent suggestion," chuckled Sir Hector. "Don't you see, my dear Williamson, if we described what our friend here calls Miss Pim's gift, why, we'd have Sir Hugh and the Staff voting us quite mad? Nothing less than Miss Pim's disappearance, in full Committee of the Staff in France, will convince them. Miss Pim, we will adopt Mr. Barton's excellent suggestion, and in four or five days you will be able to start. You will be escorted

to France, and everything possible will be done for your safety and well-being —"

"So long as you are on our side of the line," added Sir Robert. "Miss Pim," he asked her, with a frown of concentration, but not unkindly, "do you realise what you are in for?"

"Very vaguely," said Miss Pim.

"Do you realise that you may be shot, for though invisible you remain — substantial and therefore vulnerable. Do you realise that when you are across the line, beyond the German trenches, you are not beyond our fire? That when you actually enter Germany you cannot travel in a railway carriage? There are no empty seats now in German trains. You can take no luggage — nothing but what you carry on you. Do you realise —"

But here Sir Hector, smiling, interposed.

"Ah, my dear Williamson, we must n't discourage Miss Pim; it won't be so bad as all that. It will be an extraordinarily interesting experience, and in many cases *so* humorous: think of this lady's power; she can dine with the Generals, and have excellent champagne. She will not want luggage; she will take what she requires — everywhere and from any one she pleases. By Jove! what a chance. What would n't we give for such a chance! Oh, the sport of it! — and the thundering results!"

Miss Pim looked up at the faded pastel portrait of her ancestor, and said quietly: "I wish, with all my heart, Sir Hector, that I could pass my strange power on to you, but that is impossible, so you must make the best use you can of a very incompetent but very willing woman. I shall hope to be of good service, to bring back valuable information, and if I don't return — Ah, well, I shall go the way of hundreds of thousands better and younger. My kind friend here, Mr. Barton, said this was my 'call.' Well, here I am, willing to go; send me."

Both the Generals grasped Auntie Purr's hand. She blushed and made a little instinctive curtsey. Then, in a cheerful voice, begged them to come into the drawing-room for tea.

Lesley, all rosy loveliness, received them. George, of the West Surreys, was there, of course. And every one had tea and home-made cakes and cream, and the Generals talked to George and praised the West Surreys, and the Vicar's rich barytone was heard gently booming again. The great men stayed quite a long time, and "ate lots of my cake," said Lesley afterwards.

When the motor had shot away down the drive, Lesley waxed enthusiastic. "Auntie Purr, are n't they delightful? I wish I could marry him right away."

"Sir Hector?" said Miss Pim, smiling. "Yes, he is most charming, most attractive."

"No, not Sir Hector, but the other, the thick-set, bull-doggy General, Sir Robert; I think he is — simply — angelic!"

"Oh, come now," said George; "that really won't do, Lesley. I can't have you talking like that; where do I come in?"

"Oh, George! And I never asked him to make you a Captain!"

"Jolly glad you did n't. It might have lost me my commission."

"Oh, I should n't have asked baldly, like that. I should have made him feel that I — that you were conferring the favour. I could have told him what a wonderful intellect you have; how you had just been made manager of the branch business when war broke out — and that —"

"That my fiancée is a fascinating goose," added George.

"And my dear Miss Pim," asked the Vicar, "is *she* satisfied?"

Miss Pim looked up, startled from her reverie. "Am *I* satisfied? Well — yes — I suppose I am — satisfied and a little bit bewildered; but it has been a great day — and *now* for the great Adventure."

CHAPTER V

Perdita Pim sped through Northern France in a high-powered motor, with an attentive officer, and an expert chauffeur. She wore serviceable tweed, stout shoes, and a rainproof hat; she carried field-glasses and a small rucksack strapped to her shoulders, and the inevitable handbag. Captain Percy could n't imagine what Miss Pim was coming out for, but the Chiefs made a fuss about her, so he did his best to make her trip comfortable. Of course, everything was new and wonderful to Miss Pim. The masses of transport, the troops, the ammunition lorries, the Red Cross ambulances; the joyous crowds, going off expectant; the broken men — still joyous — returning; the Englishmen amid the French people; the French amid the English; all the strange, amazing fact of war, accepted by every one as commonplace. She drove through a British settlement — church, chapel, meeting-house, clubs, gymnasium, playing fields; an Aldershot in France. Captain Percy was an admirable cicerone.

They landed at the Hôtel du Cygne — "somewhere in France." Miss Pim was rather tired and not a little shaken, for the many-horse-power car had

leapt along the stone-paved roads of the North till it slowed down in an old French town, crowded with Tommies going to the front. The *déjeuner* brought rest and comparative quiet. Miss Pim asked about her brother's regiment, wondering whether it would be possible to visit him. Captain Percy thought he must be somewhere about Armentière. It was remarkable how little they had in common, these two. Miss Pim was timidly on her guard, and Captain Percy nervously pulled his mustache, wondering "what the old girl was after." She had let out that she knew nothing of nursing. She could not possibly have come out as an entertainer, singer, or conjurer. "Votes for Women"? Certainly not here — somewhere in France.

Well, they were nearing their destination. The sound of the guns told Miss Pim that she was not so very far from those parallel lines of trench where men crouched and waited to attack or be attacked.

"I am to take you to a jolly little auberge kept by Mère Dupont," said Captain Percy: "Mama Dew-Pont," as our boys call her. She defied the Boches when they smashed through, and as the Mayor was killed she assumed the scarf of office — and, by Jove, she overawed them. She thinks no end of the British, and simply worships Sir Hugh Douglas. But we shall not be here long, for every night we move

our camp 'one day's march nearer home.' Headquarters don't shift quite so fast as that, though, but when we get them on the trot, we'll have to shift forward pretty quick. Here we are. Now I must leave you in better hands, and hurry off to report."

Mère Dupont, a stout, self-possessed Frenchwoman, dressed in black with a vast black alpaca apron, and a white tulle cap tied under her ample chin, gave her fat dimpled hand to help Madame descend; and with few words, but with the long look of understanding which is sympathy, led Miss Pim to "votre appartement au premier," a large room flooded with the tender glory of a setting sun; the waxed parquet was uneven, rising in gentle waves here and there; the furniture, upholstered, of course, in crimson Utrecht velvet, was tightly backed with spotless crochet; before each fauteuil was a little round of matting bound with braid. The bed was important; it towered like a man-of-war, in highly polished walnut, and the eider-down reposed on it like an immense soufflé.

"I know the English taste; Madame wants tea. My officers have come to prefer Mère Dupont's café, but Madame shall have real English tea, et des gaufres."

The tea came at last in a large metal pot, with a wire basket attached to the spout and a small quantity of boiling hot milk.

A big farm servant-girl, in short skirts, her bare feet thrust into straw slippers, disposed of the tray on a table with uneven legs, and retired breathing noisily. Miss Pim laughs to this day at the recollection of that famous *thé anglais*, mysterious sticks and chips floating in warm water; the perfume was not unpleasant, though slightly medicinal. The liquid, poured out, was pale lavender in colour.

No wonder the officers preferred Madame Dupont's café.

The sudden stillness was very soothing: the windows looked out on a *potager* and beyond was a farm — the comfortable lowing of cattle could be heard, and at intervals the call of a green parrot, — "Vite, vite — si non," and then a string of naughty words.

Everything had happened so quickly since that fateful day that Miss Pim felt as though she had lost all initiative. "I can hardly call my soul my own, — certainly I cannot call my body my own, — and now I am, as it were, to be blindfolded — turned round three times and shoved into Germany!" Miss Pim now took the War Office instructions from her handbag — general instructions, as to making maps, describing gun emplacements, simple instructions regarding the compass, showing relative positions from various starting-points. Miss Pim carried two compasses: one provided by Sir Hector Russell; the

other, in the form of a locket she wore round her neck, was a gift from Lesley. It had taken Miss Pim many hours to understand the use of a compass, and as for map-making, her main idea seemed to be a picturesque sketch of doubtful accuracy. She now felt keenly her general incapacity. "How defective my education has been! I know nothing of topography — nothing of engineering. I cannot drive a motor and I could not possibly fly." She had spent three afternoons at Froghurst firing off a service revolver at a haystack. She had hit the haystack and incidentally killed a sow, coming round at the moment: but although she could load the "pistol," her aim was most uncertain; the revolver invariably jerked up, or dipped down. It had been decided that she was not to carry a revolver, since she would always be able to commandeer any German officer's weapon. "My dear father little foresaw what his Perdita would one day be called upon to do! If I had had, say, a few months' notice, how I should have trained! Day and night I should have trained. I should have studied German military terms, tactics, gunnery — everything likely to be of value to a — well, to a spy. It is something to be thankful for that I know German so well. Sir Hector Russell assured me that few officers know French, and there are hardly any who know German." Miss Pim sighed and looked round

the room. The pictures on the walls were interesting, crudely coloured prints representing La première Communion, La Mariée, Le Deuil. On the mantelpiece stood an impressive gilt clock, — a golden maiden standing on one toe pointing to a winged and gilded youth, very scantily clad, asleep on a gilt bank; on the pedestal of this group were engraved the words, "L'Amour dort." Next to the clock was a small polished shell, with a label, "Obus allemand, 1870."

Miss Pim felt restless. A longing for Maman Dupont and "dear human speech" induced her to creep down the stairs and start exploring, when cheerful English voices, in detestable and incorrect French, made her retreat to a dark angle.

"Ho-là! Ho-là! Mother Dupont! Here come your hungry children."

"Your thirsty children, you mean," broke in another voice.

"On y va, on y va," called Mère Dupont. "Voyez moi ça — ces gosses anglais! Comme ça mange! et comme ça boit! Hé! Hé! Mais ils le méritent bien."

The officers went into the yard and were plunging heads and hands into pails of water, whilst the farm girl stood by, ready to hand them, from a pile, large squares of creamy white homespun linen, as towels. Miss Pim fled back to her room over the *salle à*

manger, and shortly after heard the scraping of chairs on the boarded floor and the clatter of knives and forks.

But the meal was short, and soon the men withdrew, some to their rooms, others strolling about the *potager*, the delicate aroma of cigars and cigarettes stealing in at the window.

Mère Dupont herself now came up to fetch down Miss Pim. The *salle à manger* was orderly, and at the far end of the long table a small cloth was spread for Miss Pim, and there she tasted a dinner fit for — a princess. Never had Miss Pim sat down to such a treat, — hot, appetising, properly flavoured, — a French meal, such as all classes in France expect and enjoy. This time and with more reason Perdita Pim felt that her education had been neglected. "Let me see your cuisine and thank your cuisinière," she said to her hostess, who stood calm as a lady abbess, smiling at Miss Pim's enthusiasm. And what a surprise was that kitchen, a quite small outhouse or lean-to, stone-paved; no fireplace proper, only a moderate-sized stove covered with earthen marmites and some burnished copper stew-pans. The cook was a little wizened hunchback, with the face of a very old monkey. She wore a frilled white cap — close round her face it came, enhancing its mahogany hue. She had to stand on a wooden stool to look into her sauce-pans, a veritable old witch — with the skill of

a witch, too. An officer's orderly was scraping carrots. Suddenly the dwarf darted across to him and gave him a sound *claque* on the cheek.

"Voyez moi ça!" she screamed, holding up a piece of carrot peel; "c'est comme ça qu'il épluche mes carottes."

"What *does* she mean?" asked Miss Pim.

The orderly rubbed his cheek and grinned. "Oh, I cut a bit deep in that there carrot. Mamzelle thought it waste, and besides, according to the French folk, you lose the flavour of the vegetable if you cut away too much of the outside. But lor! they do know how to cook. Why, they can make a rare meal with what we throw away! As for their corfee!" And the orderly threw up his eyes in ecstasy.

Miss Pim turned to Madame and asked where the *fille de cuisine* was?

"Oh, we need no fille de cuisine, unless you count *him*," pointing to the orderly. "Madeleine does all the cooking and washing up. Of course, when we have a great concourse of officers, Marie Rose, the girl, lends a hand. Ah! il faut *bûcher* ces jours-ci," she said, laughing.

Miss Pim thought of the cook at Froghurst, who considered a kitchen-maid insufficient and insisted on a scullery-maid as well. Mère Dupont seemed to read what was passing in her mind.

"Oh, yes; I have heard about your English servants, but all English people are lazy. Vous êtes devenus une race paresseuse — excepté quand vous vous battez."

"If I get back to Froghurst," thought Miss Pim — but that "if" reminded her of her mission. "How much better Mère Dupont would do it," she thought humbly. At the door of the *auberge* stood a young British officer — "To see the English lady."

"If you are rested and it is quite convenient, will you allow me to escort you to Headquarters at the Mairie. Sir Hugh Douglas is very anxious to see you."

Miss Pim walked through the village high street with the boyish captain.

"Is n't it a ripping evening? Summer has come with a rush, and after such months of wet misery. Do you know the Chief personally? — Oh, well, after five minutes you'll feel you've known him for ever so long. He's awfully understanding."

They were now at the Town Hall, a big whitewashed house, in no way imposing. Miss Pim was taken into a large room, where officers sat at telephones, and maps lay in rolls on large deal tables.

Sir Hugh hastened to greet her. "Miss Pim, I am exceedingly glad to meet you. I think we had better get out of this room; there are too many telephones

going, — it would disturb you. Here, Murcott, Desmond, Price, you come along with us, and send across for Aymes. This way, Miss Pim." And he led her up a fine staircase to a large room overlooking the *place*. Colonel Price carried up a big lamp.

"Of course, you know, Miss Pim, we are quite in the dark, —" began Sir Hugh.

Then every one started laughing, for the lamp suddenly faded out. Colonel Price jumped on a table and lit the candles in a chandelier suspended from the ceiling. Two more lamps were brought in, and the room was brilliantly illumined.

"We none of us know in the least what you can do for us — what you intend to do. Sir Robert speaks emphatically, but he is cryptic. So here we are, all most eager to know, and ready to help you all we can."

Miss Pim had prepared many little speeches, but not a word could she remember. So she said quickly: —

"Well, Sir Robert wishes me to cross over to the German lines, to note the gun emplacements, to put the guns out of action, if only for a bit. Oh, I don't know what else he suggests, — to shoot the Kaiser, I think; also Hindenburg and others; to take their maps, and printed instructions, and to terrify the men, if possible."

Miss Pim had got so used to the idea of what *could* be done, she had forgotten the effect her words would have on the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff. They were looking at each other in utter bewilderment. At this juncture General Aymes entered.

"Hullo! I hope I'm not too late to hear the plans."

"Oh, they are quite simple," said Colonel Murcott dryly, "this lady has come to spike the German guns, kill the Kaiser and Hindenburg, and get all their maps. What!"

Sir Hugh Douglas moved restlessly and said with some asperity: —

"Please, Miss Pim, explain yourself. Williamson has written to me quite seriously. He did not, however, tell me your plans. He merely said you could be of use. Please, Miss Pim, collect yourself, and then make it clear how you propose to be of service to — the British Army."

Sir Hugh's manner was cold, his tone cutting, and his grey eyes flashed. Miss Pim suddenly felt nervous and trapped. Oh, if only kind Sir Hector Russell were with her, or the dear Vicar. The Men of War would never understand or believe. She stood by the table, looking round at the door, as though she meditated flight.

"Here, sit down, Miss Pim," said Colonel Murcott. "Gentlemen, be seated. There is no hurry; take

your own time, and be sure of our sympathetic attention. You see, you have rather knocked us out, and at the first round," he added kindly.

"I know," said Miss Pim, feeling a nervous inclination to laugh or cry, she was not sure which. "I *know* that what I said was surprising, but it is nothing to what I am going to do — now, and here."

The Staff stared at her in silence.

"You see," continued Miss Pim, "I am just an ordinary, rather incompetent English lady. I am not brave, I am not trained to suffer or endure, but I am patriotic; I mean I am willing to suffer for my country, that is why I am here."

Sir Hugh pushed back his chair impatiently, but Murcott put his hand soothingly on his sleeve, and his lips shaped the unspoken word, "*Wait.*"

"I am here," said Miss Pim steadily, rising from her chair, "because I have the faculty of *disappearing!*"

"Oh! Rot!" cried Sir Hugh fiercely; then he added, "I beg your pardon, Miss Pim, but we are engaged in such tremendous business we cannot — permit ourselves to be detained by talk like this."

"Still, Sir Hugh, remember that Sir Robert Williamson sent me; it would — I feel sure now — it would have been better if he had told you of my strange and quite unaccountable power, but it was

thought to be so incredible, he preferred that you should learn about this power, by actual demonstration. If you will now watch me closely, you will see me disappear, and this chair will also disappear."

Miss Pim seated herself, folded her hands, closed her eyes, and — nothing happened! Gladly would she have disappeared *forever;* she realised the saying about blood running cold. A sound as of rushing waters was in her ears. She dared not open her eyes or look up.

Sir Hugh rose very quietly. "I think now," he said, "the farce is played out. Murcott, will you conduct this lady back to the inn. There must be some hankey-pankey about those letters, purporting to come from Williamson." Sir Hugh strode to the door. But Miss Pim was quicker, she flung herself against the door, with outstretched arms and stared up into the irate General's face. Then, leaning her head back against the door, she disappeared, and the door also disappeared and the passage became dimly visible.

Sir Hugh started back and the Staff grouped round him.

"Sir Hugh," said Miss Pim faintly, "I am still here, standing against the door. Put out your hand and feel."

Like a blind man Sir Hugh groped. He passed his

hand over Miss Pim's face, felt her head and shoulders, the door beyond.

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to the others, "is this exact? Has the lady really disappeared, or am I hypnotised?"

"If you are, sir, we are all equally affected. We can neither see Miss Pim nor the door."

Miss Pim joyfully submitted to the imposition of hands; eagerly they questioned her, all at once, boyishly, impulsively. Suddenly a knocking was heard against the invisible door. General Rayner stood there, visible to all, but unable to enter. Miss Pim moved aside, still invisible, and the door reappeared. She sank down in a chair and the chair disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

General Rayner apologised for interrupting.

"I have driven over from M——," he said, "to ask about those ambulances — but you all look so — so excited," he added.

"So would you — so *will* you!" they cried.

"Only, see here, Rayner, not a word to any living soul!" cautioned Colonel Price.

"Why, he might tell every one, quite safely," said General Aymes; "they'd only call him drunk — or —"

"A nervous breakdown," cried Murcott, laughing rather shrilly.

Miss Pim was now called on to reappear. She could not veil the glint of exultation in her eyes. The Commander-in-Chief looked very happy and boyish.

"You really must forgive me, because it all seemed so wildly impossible. I shall doubt again, I really shall want to see you disappear repeatedly before I can quite accept this. To-morrow morning I shall consider it the craze of a fevered brain. But seriously, Miss Pim, this requires a lot of thinking over. We can give you definite instructions, but we bind you to nothing; the possibilities of this adventure are — immense."

"Oh, do put 'Little Willie' out of existence. We all have a special loathing for that particular specimen of German vermin!" cried young Captain Pemberton.

"Better dispose of the buffalo Hindenburg," said another.

General Rayner looked round the room in utter amazement. What were they all talking about? Who was this woman he had not noticed on entering? Why was the Chief looking so jolly and so wild? They must have had a champagne dinner.

"Yes, Rayner, I know we all seem quite dotty," said Colonel Murcott, putting his hand on the General's shoulder, "and it is useless explaining, — it makes it all seem more crazy than ever, — but this lady will do it again, I am sure. Miss Pim, do put the General out of his misery. He thinks we are all daft. Now, Rayner, see this lady; please take hold of her hand and watch."

General Rayner, greatly mystified, grasped Miss Pim's hand, and he determined she should not get away; but suddenly she was obliterated, though he felt her hand and could hear her low laugh, — and not only Miss Pim was invisible, but General Rayner's own hand and arm had disappeared.

There was a pause, and Miss Pim reappeared, still held by the officer.

"Now you know as much as we do," they cried. "Sir Robert Williamson has sent this lady over to us, and the Chief is going to send her over to the Boches."

"You have had an awfully trying day of it," said the C.C. "Please get what rest and refreshment you can. A day or so at the Hôtel de la Poste won't be so bad. My friend, Madame Dupont, will make you very comfortable, and one of us will take you about in a car. We must have a council of war over this, and then we will make everything clear to you. I hope I am forgiven." And, as he stretched out his hand to her, Miss Pim again noted that extremely boyish, that young, almost exultant, expression illuminate the face of the Commander-in-Chief.

Two days later Miss Pim was fully instructed. She was told what was important to discover and what she should try to do. These instructions were secret, and it is therefore not proposed to give them here. Various maps were given to her, and these she was advised to carry with her. The typewritten instructions she was to read sufficiently often to memorize, and before leaving our lines she was to burn them.

Sir Hugh had selected the point where she could most safely cross over to the German side. This was on the French front, and a French officer would con-

duct her to Le Bois des Chevaliers and there leave her, near a great oak, known as "Le Chêne du Couvent." Everything had been thought out as far as possible, but Sir Hugh assured Miss Pim that she must not feel tied and bound, but do as she thought best, according to circumstances.

"It will be a great day of rejoicing, the day of your return, and I assure you we shall await it in some anxiety, though I think the chances of your safe return amount to practical certainty; the only thing I fear is the possibility of your power failing you — in which case you could never hope to return."

"I confess that very thought has occurred to me, and has slightly troubled me, but — there! — I must just risk it. And now, please, Sir Hugh, let me say good-bye this evening. You say that Capitaine Rothan calls for me at eight o'clock in the morning. I want none of my English friends to see me off. I want to slip away quietly. Does this French officer know what I am going to do? Does he know about this — this faculty I have?"

"Not a word. He has his orders to take you to that particular spot and to leave you there, and he knows you are my — trusted friend, Miss Pim."

Sir Hugh gave his hand to the poor lady, who was too much moved for words, and she turned away to

the Hôtel de la Poste, where Madame Dupont greeted her affectionately. Special delicacies had been prepared for Miss Pim's rucksack, and the officers had sent her more chocolate and *pâté de foie gras* and tins of biscuits than she could possibly carry. She made her selection, giving the rest to Madame Dupont. Then, having no luggage to pack, she sat down by the window in her pleasant room and read over the typed pages of instructions which she could almost repeat by heart. When quite sure of them, she descended to the *cuisine*, and, asking the little deformed cook to open the stove, thrust the papers into the glowing furnace.

Then she stood by the door looking out over the vegetable garden and listened to the dull roar of guns. "And that goes on day and night and will go on — till we *break* them," she thought. Suddenly she heard a voice behind her say: "No regrets, Miss Pim?" And she turned to greet Colonel Murcott.

"No; I have n't a regret, unless for my own incapacity," she replied gravely. "But it is an awful undertaking."

"Yes; you will see suffering and brutality beyond — belief. Those English men and women who live quietly at home in our tight little island have n't a notion of what war means — war as understood by

the Boches! There'd be less talk of sparing them humiliation and considering punishment *revengeful* if they saw what we see. Nothing less than breaking the Boches will do. Lord! How I wish the British and Russian pacifists could be taken across those lines over there, and be enslaved by the Huns! Oh! they would understand the Germans then, and realise that the only remedy for German Kultur is to conquer them." And Colonel Murcott tightened his lips.

"Yes," said Miss Pim; "of course, I am quite safe so long as I keep invisible, but it is difficult to *feel* invisible, to realise you are invisible. People appear to be looking at you, and seeing you, when they really cannot. I wonder whether I shall ever get used to it."

"What a lot of things are happening now which one can never get used to!" said Colonel Murcott, leaning against the door, looking up into the starry sky. "Do you know, Miss Pim, I cannot get used to this war! It still seems so unreal — and yet — it is by far the most real thing in the whole world. This tremendous war! And it did n't come unheralded. We ought to have read the signs, for they were written large for all to read. But we refused to read, we turned our heads away. 'War,' we said, 'was impossible, because we hate war.' And then — suddenly —

the impossible was a reality. And yet, as I said before, I cannot feel used to it — though I have been fighting since September, 1914. This refusal of the mind to realise horrors is, I believe, protective; it helps to keep one sane and balanced. When you see all your men falling, all your officers killed, when everything seems hopeless, as it often did in 1914, then this strange fancy that after all it is a dream, something imaginary, — this feeling that death and defeat are *unreal,* I believe it helped me; certainly it did in the first battle of Ypres. I really did not recognise the awfulness of — of everything. I decided we were going to stand all right and hold back the Boche. Oh, there's a lot it does n't do to think of — that one cannot bear to recall. I expect you will see things over there which you will not care to recall."

"I am sure of that, but I shall all my life be glad I have been able to do something for England, and that thought will outweigh everything," said Miss Pim earnestly, looking up at the beautiful bronzed face of the soldier.

"Another comforting thought," continued he, "is that physical pain is meant to be forgotten, — there is nothing lasting in it, — and those that suffered cannot recall, cannot retrace pain. You can recall fear, hatred, anger, but pain refuses to be remembered. You can remember about it, but not *it.* The

ineffaceably horrible thing is cruelty, which is always ineffectual and really useless. Cruelty seems to me the hallmark of the Devil. The cruelty of the German is something quite unbelievable and unspeakable; and sometimes I feel — but no, Miss Pim, I must restrain my thoughts and my recollections."

Suddenly the throb of a motor was heard, and soon after a fine Panhard stopped before the Hôtel de la Poste.

"Probably this is Capitaine Rothan, who is to escort you to-morrow. I know him; he is an awfully good fellow, and only recently he received the Military Cross."

Colonel Murcott went to the front entrance and greeted a slight young officer in the pale-blue French uniform.

"Miss Pim, allow me to present to you my good friend Capitaine Rothan."

The young Frenchman straightened himself, then bowed profoundly. Miss Pim looked at him with some curiosity; his was the last friendly face she was to see till she returned. He was thin and sallow; his eyes were large and melancholy; he had no appearance of a man of action.

"Charmé, Madame," he murmured.

And then Colonel Murcott explained that Sir Hugh Douglas wanted to see him, and that there

were papers to take back to the French General. "So Capitaine Rothan will be ready with his motor at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Do you stick to your refusal, Miss Pim, — your refusal to let me see you off?"

Miss Pim smiled and stretched out her hand. "It will be better to have your kind greetings on my return, Colonel."

And so the good lady parted with England, withdrew to her salon bedchamber, and sat at the window giving out on to the soft darkness. The moon had disappeared behind mountains of cloud, which also blotted out the stars. The maternal scent of cows rose from the yard where they shouldered each other and moaned occasionally. But at intervals the silence and the darkness were rent by the eruptive roar of guns and the sudden play of light in the sky.

CHAPTER VII

Miss Pim felt very desolate and helpless; for the first time she had serious doubts regarding the value of any work she could do in the German lines. "If there had been anything I could do, I should have had more definite instructions; everything is left to me. Why? Because they know I can do little or nothing; it is doubtful whether Colonel Murcott himself could do much, but — but — a Miss Pim! What can she do? Of course, I may somehow get killed in the venture, but that is only important to me. No; the honest truth is that I am not likely to effect much, and what information I shall be able to bring from actual observation will be nil. So there is nothing much to it all. I go in comparative safety; I shall probably return without difficulty. I shall not even have the gratification of writing my adventures, because no one would believe me. Perdita Pim, there is nothing heroic in all this, and you are not entitled to self-pity; wipe away those ridiculous tears, and just realise that you are ever so lucky to be enjoying a unique adventure."

So Miss Pim fell asleep to the music of the guns, and slept through the trumpet calls of chanticleer

heralding the dawn, the trampling of cattle going out to pasture, the clanking of zinc pails, the hiccough of the old pump; she slept till Rose Marie noisily entered her room and thumped down a well-laden tray.

"Oh, Madame was to eat well; Madame was going on a long journey." Café-au-lait was poured out into a thick blue bowl. New bread was spread with rich yellow butter. An omelette, still sighing from the frying-pan, lay in fat and golden folds on a dish. Honey in the comb, its sweetness pouring from the wounded cells, attracted distressed bees, which hovered about with low murmurs. A bowl of soured cream and fine white sugar competed with a glass saucer of quince preserve to win Miss Pim's favour. It was nearly seven o'clock and at eight she was to start; so there was no time to lose. But a woman without trunks is soon ready, and before eight she was downstairs with Madame Dupont, who embraced her, and called her "Ma chère enfant."

"I don't know your mission, my dear, but I do know it is for France; so God bless you. Keep your head, though the advice is needless to an English man or woman. Remember, too, that au fonds the Germans are cowards; that is the great, the most marked characteristic of the brute — cowardice and cruelty; the cruelty being the outcome of the cow-

ardice. I have observed them closely, my dear, and take my word for it, they are vermin. We French do not speak in ignorance, we *know*."

Madame certainly seemed to know Miss Pim was going over into the German lines. Yes; she was a far-seeing woman, and Miss Pim was inclined to take her view of the German people.

Capitaine Rothan, looking just as weary and melancholy, was standing by the great car. He handed Miss Pim into the front seat, tucked a military cloak round her, climbed in beside her, and took the steering wheel. His orderly jumped in at the back and the car swung round; in a second it was at the Mairie, where it slowed down; on the balcony were grouped the Staff officers. They gave a ringing cheer, and dropped flowers into the car, which then leapt ahead like a live thing. Capitaine Rothan looked at Miss Pim, with a gentle smile. "C'est gentil, n'est-ce pas? Ces braves garçons!"

Miss Pim found her companion delightful. He talked of his home, his mother and sisters; he showed no curiosity about her. This kind reticence was a great relief to Miss Pim, who knew not the art of fencing, and must have met any enquiries regarding her mission with a blank refusal to give information. He told her a great deal about the French army, and the wonderful feeling existing between officers and

men. He spoke with exceeding regard of the British officers, and of the Tommies with fervour.

"We are now going to take a hill with great celerity," he said, as a road like a white ribbon rose before them. "This road is frequently shelled, but we must risk it. Keep as low as you can, but look to your left; there in the distance you will see odd zigzags of snowy whiteness; those are our trenches, and beyond — are the Boches."

As he spoke, the car put on speed, and soon they were tearing up to a ridge, along which they skimmed even as a bird flies. Miss Pim then saw on her left a desolate plain, oddly marked as with an Etruscan pattern, splotched in white; pearly balls of smoke broke loose from the distance; invisible guns challenged or barked defiance. In a few moments the road dipped and they were in a cutting, edged with trees.

"This is the beginning of the Bois des Chevaliers. There is a jolly little auberge here, where Mme. Popineau will give us a déjeuner."

The humble inn, a long low cottage, bore a sign, "Aux cœurs joyeux," represented by three heart-shaped faces grinning.

The single room was crowded with soldiers; they rose respectfully with one bound, and carried forward a form-like table. Capitaine Rothan had it

placed outside in the shade and called for Madame — *la mariée*. The bride was only eighteen, a merry girl, cooking at a small stove. Capitaine Rothan peered into the saucepan and marmites, to the delight of the soldiers, the bride laughing and blushing. There was no tablecloth, but Madame wiped away the red wine which had trickled on to the table and fetched a piece of white muslin which she laid in double folds. A bunch of marigolds in a jug helped to keep the muslin from fluttering away. And again Miss Pim tasted a perfect French *déjeuner* — cooked by an artist: blue trout, a soup of milk and vegetables, a hot-pot of chicken and mushroom, and an *omelette aux confitures*.

The French captain and the pretty bride were concerned at Madame's lack of appetite, but soon every one's attention was diverted by the bursting of shells on the hill road they had just come by.

The soldiers in the *estaminet* jeered and laughed.

"Ça y est, mon vieux; better luck next time; perhaps some day by chance you'll make a hit."

"Ah, but they killed poor old Mother Gasté's donkey yesterday," cried the bride, "and she can no longer drive to the market. It is a shame, poor old thing."

"The hat, the hat — pass the hat," yelled an excited soldier. Soon a tin helmet was passed round,

and Miss Pim could hear the coppers and white money rattle into the helmet.

"Holá!" shouted Capitaine Rothan; "are the officers forbidden to subscribe? Here, bring the hat round."

A shy, red-faced soldier boy, with vest unbuttoned, came awkwardly forward. Capitaine Rothan threw in some silver, and Miss Pim dropped in a ten-franc note.

"Why, that will buy two bourriques for Mère Gasté," cried the delighted bride, as she emptied the helmet into her blue apron.

"If this is the Bois de Chevaliers," said Miss Pim to her companion, "the Chêne du Couvent cannot be very far off, and it is there you are to leave me. Would it not be better to leave your car here, and we could walk to the place?"

"Hardly that, my dear Madame! Just think, if I returned here without you! What would be said? No, we must go on; the wood is pretty extensive, and on the left hand reaches almost to our trenches. I will switch the car into a by-road, and then we can make our way on foot to the famous oak."

So they left the Auberge des Cœurs Joyeux. All the soldiers stood at attention, those a little uncertain on their feet being propped up at the back.

And once more they were on their way. The wood

was now dense on either side; not a sombre forest of dark trees, but green depths of young oak and chestnut. The car turned down a mossy old cart-track and stopped, out of sight of the road. There followed a wonderful walk, the yielding moss, the varied leafage, glades opening on every side, the undergrowth of fern, giving place to woodland grass, and some sweet herb which yielded a delicate perfume when bruised by footsteps.

Miss Pim was grateful to the French officer for not speaking. With his quick French intuition he understood the gravity of the occasion. She glanced at his lean, careworn face and melancholy eyes, and felt that he was in harmony with her mood.

At last they came to a ruined stone archway. "All that remains of the convent! And here is the only old tree of the Bois des Chevaliers, the Chêne du Couvent." Miss Pim looked up at the oak, mighty in girth, but rather dwarfed in stature. The old twisted branches were poor in leafage, but for all that it was noble and it represented to Miss Pim's imagination the British Oak.

"And it is here, Monsieur, that you leave me," she said, stroking the grey-green bark of the tree.

"Yes, Madame, it is here I leave you, à regrets. I do not know what it is you have undertaken to do; indeed, I do not seek to know. It is something finē

and courageous, that is certain, for Madame is English; that is sufficient. But I am not without anxiety on your account, Madame; will you do me a favour? Will you wear this for the sake of — all your friends?"

So saying he loosened his collar, and fumbled for a delicate little gold chain, to which was attached a small gold medal. He drew the chain off, and put it in Miss Pim's hand with the medal. On it was enamelled the figure of the Virgin in a blue mantle with tiny white stars round her head.

"Wear this as a protection; Notre Dame Marie will be very near you."

"But you, Capitaine Rothan? You deprive yourself —"

"Not of her protection, Madame. No; I shall be doubly blessed if you will wear it. I shall pray for you, Madame."

"And I will pray for you, Monsieur," replied Miss Pim.

"My name is Rolant," he said quietly.

"I will wear this, Rolant, and I will pray for you."

Miss Pim put out her hand, and in the Bois des Chevaliers young Rolant kissed her hand gravely like a knight of old.

"Madame, when you return, will you let me know? This is my card, giving the name and number of my regiment and company."

CHAPTER VIII

A GREAT silence fell and Miss Pim was alone. She leant her cheek against the grey bark of the hoary oak, and again felt that sense of desolation which had seized her the night before. "This will never do, General Pim," she said to herself. "You have got to carry this through." She sat down between the big straggling roots of the protecting oak, and went over her instructions. She should cross to the German lines about four o'clock; it was not yet two. Miss Pim decided not to walk about the wood; she knew her direction from the oak, and by the oak she would sit till the fateful hour.

The sun was very hot, the old tree was too bald with age to afford her much shelter from the sun, but she would not leave its rough, protecting breast. So, leaning there, Miss Pim fell asleep, a deep, dreamless sleep, from which she was awakened by the vicious scream of a jay. Much startled, she stared round her. Where was she? What had happened? Then it all flooded back on her: it was time — time to set out on the great adventure.

She stood up against the oak, leant back her head and — disappeared; but fully to satisfy herself she

brought out a small pocket mirror. Yes, she had disappeared; there was no reflection. Then, taking out her compass, she started off, just as her watch marked four o'clock. She went easily and softly on the elastic moss. The old grandpapa oak had disappeared, and the wood was thinning. Suddenly she came upon lines and lines of French soldiers lying in the bracken, peering down a slope on to open country; and there, below, she saw the white edging of the trenches. Everywhere, now, the wood seemed alive and watchful. Under bowers of growing trees, tied together at the top, were colossal guns, approached by platforms decorated with branches freshly cut. The men were talking and laughing quite at ease. There was no firing on either side, only acute watchfulness.

Miss Pim decided to walk down the slope, trembling as she nearly stumbled over a *poilu* hidden in the fern. Down she scrambled to the transverse cuttings leading to the trenches. She found it difficult to pass; men ran into her and stared about trying to see what had obstructed them; sometimes she slipped into the entrance of a dugout or flattened herself against a parapet, till at last she faced that sad open stretch where no man may show himself and live.

Miss Pim gazed and gazed at the desolate scene,

wondering how she would mount the parapet, and how she could possibly get through the inextricable entanglement of barbed wire. She had a wire-cutter in her handbag; but what a formidable task! How was she to cut the wire without attracting attention, and when cut, how would she be able to get through the entanglement in a skirt? She had expected neat taut stretches of barbed wire, which with a snip-snap she could walk through. But this! And then on the German side it would be as bad or worse. It was useless to wait for darkness. She must get through whilst it was daylight, whilst she could see where she was going and what she was doing. Noticing rough steps a little way down the trench, which led up to the parapet, she made her way thither, and mounted, but on the other side was a ditch and no easy descent. Miss Pim walked a long distance, till she came to an inward curve with rough steps leading down. Descending cautiously, she came up to a hedge of wires, held up, at intervals, by rough posts and staves.

Miss Pim had been taught how to cut wire by some of Sir Hugh Douglas's staff, but her hand trembled as she started cutting the barbed wire which sprang up when cut and seemed to defy her. Nevertheless, she worked on steadily; the sun was still very fierce, and French and German appeared too tired and sleepy to move. Miss Pim was dreadfully

afraid that the sound of the clippers would start the French firing. Once she was afraid that inadvertently she had reappeared. The hedge of wire negotiated, she found herself in a dead grey waste, pitted with great shell-holes, filled with muddy water, the limitless desolation appeared as the negation of mind and purpose. Nothing had shape or meaning or even colour. What most struck Miss Pim was, not the presence of Death, so much as the absence of Intelligence, and Order; there was not a germ of life or growth, promise of fruit, nor progress; only sunken heaps of clothing marked where men had fallen.

As in a dream Miss Pim passed along this land of Nevermore, till she found her advance stopped by another hedge of wire, more toothed, and thicker than what she had already dealt with. Her hands ached with clipping, and her cutter was blunted. She thought of going back to the French lines, but no, that would never do! Miss Pim had come out for a purpose; till that was accomplished there was no retreating, so she resolutely tackled the German wire. Loud songs and the tinkle of a zithern covered the sound of the cutter.

At last she was through, and, mounting the parapet, she looked down on rows of men, — stout, perspiring young Germans, playing at cards, or singing, quite in an off-duty sort of way. Some, however, were

still dangerously alert, and Miss Pim felt that her position was precarious. She looked about her for some means of descending without attracting too much attention, when suddenly, quite near her, a sniper fired his rifle, and in her fright down dropped Miss Pim on to four sleeping Huns, bringing with her part of the parapet. In a moment the wildest confusion reigned. The soldiers began firing quite recklessly; officers came rushing out of dugouts, buttoning their tunics, their faces white, their eyes bulging, asking in short, guttural barks what had happened. One man appeared with his hands up, thinking those pig dogs of French had taken the trench.

All this confusion favoured Miss Pim's escape, but she was well within range of the French 75 guns, and therefore did not feel safe till she had put some miles between herself and the trenches.

What a day of emotions and fatigue! She must choose some resting-place for the night, but where should she go? The poor French peasants would be far too terrified to give her shelter, and too poor and hungry to give her food. Miss Pim was surprised to find French villages intact; it is true the Huns occupied all the more well-to-do houses, but the poor little *chaumières* still had roofs and windows. Miss Pim had not realised that these towns and villages of Western France had been occupied since 1914 —

the Germans coming down like a wolf on the fold. A few cavalrymen had dashed down upon the place, followed by goose-stepping Uhlans or Bavarians, or other regiments, all trained to ruthlessness and cruelty. The gardens were cultivated, the fields promised rich crops, because old men, women, and children, all were enslaved to work for the cruel, rapacious Boches.

Miss Pim could hardly believe her eyes. Here were trees heavy with fruit, yet to ripen. Wheat and oats already knee-deep. Were the French happy and prosperous, after all? But she was not long in uncertainty. Entering the village, she saw a crowd of German soldiers, all red-faced and vociferous; some were scowling, others were laughing; the men laughing looked the more terrible and menacing. They held a young girl by the arms, which they twisted behind her; the girl was barefooted and wore a coarse apron of sacking, her head was bent, and her hair fell loose and heavy like a veil. The girl was about to become a mother. Miss Pim walked straight up to her and in a loud, clear voice cried in French, "Have courage, my child. Le Bon Dieu will not forsake you."

The girl shook back her mane and looked round, her emaciated face shone with the perspiration of terror, her lips were as white as her cheeks. The brutal men stopped their ribald talk, still twisting

the girl's arms. Miss Pim walked round amongst them, saying mockingly in German, "So this is German Kultur! Every man who harms a woman or a child or an old man shall die; he is doomed; you are all doomed." Miss Pim kept on moving round the girl, repeating to the Germans, "You are doomed!"

The men looked at each other, much frightened. Then, without warning, as happens in a wild panic, they let go of the girl and scattered. The girl slid, like a lizard, into a little house, and Miss Pim stood alone in an abandoned village street in the gathering twilight.

CHAPTER IX

She now decided to resume visibility and knock at the door of the house where the girl had taken refuge. She knocked gently and could hear soft scufflings within and panting breath.

"Ouvrez," she said quietly at the keyhole. "I am not German. I bring you good news."

She could hear a whispered parley, and the door was cautiously opened. She slipped into a dark room and the door was refastened; then cold, eager hands reached out to her, hands hardened by toil. They drew her and pushed her into a room at the back. What a strange little group she saw there: a tall old peasant, leaning on a stick; an old, old woman, with the face of a seer; girls whose pale faces shone almost phosphorescent in the deepening twilight; and small children looking up at her with such waiting, hungry eyes.

"Oh! my friends," cried Miss Pim, in broken accents, "I am English. I have come across secretly, to bring you good news. The French and the English are advancing to deliver you. Soon this village will be France again. The Germans are retreating; we have more men and more guns than the Boches. The

Night will soon have passed and the great new Dawn is coming to France and to the whole world."

"No, Madame; we are all lost, all forsaken," said the old man huskily.

Whereupon the woman, who looked aged beyond computation, in a high, trembling voice, chanted — "This is the truth — France is victorious — France shall soon come into her own — we shall live to see that day — because we could not die till that beautiful day had come — then we shall pass away happy."

"Madame, you saved me from the monsters!" said a voice in Miss Pim's ears. — "Madame, give us food," cried the children. — "Madame, do not stay here. The Germans will certainly kill you if they find you, and they will then spit us all on their bayonets," cried one of the women. — "But you have given us comfort and hope," cried another woman.

"You must carry on that message of comfort to others," said Miss Pim. "Tell me, where are the Headquarters of these soldiers."

"Down the main road, then to the right, and Madame will see the gates of the château. Oh, the thieves and murderers, they have taken away all the things in the château, even Madame la Comtesse's clothes, and they stabled horses in le grand salon, walking them up the terrace steps by boards."

"Yes, and they have taken everything *here*," piped

a little boy, "all Grand'mère's linen, and all our casseroles."

"And my little bowl," cried a wee girl; "they took my little bowl, and they put out the eyes of my poupée and tore off her arms."

"Madame, let me see your face," said the old man. "We are not able to afford lights, but I will light these resinous twigs so that we can see the face of the brave Englishwoman if only for a few seconds."

Standing outside the back door, amid a crowd of poor French people who had heard of Miss Pim's coming, the old man held aloft a torch of crackling pine. Miss Pim stepped forward and looked at the careworn people. A strange sight, never to be forgotten, the leaping light, the wall of faces, all stamped with privation and fear, the solemn old man who held the lighted sticks till the flame gave out and a shower of sparks scattered. Then a distant bugle sounded, and Miss Pim decided to slip away, unseen. She must sleep in the woods, that was clear, but she wished to visit the château before retiring to rest. Her small stock of food must be kept for emergencies. It was important therefore to secure a "bite" from headquarters; the soldiers were not going hungry, and perhaps she could carry away a good meal for the poor hungry people she had left.

What a scene at the château! Orderlies, men of

the auxiliary service, were hurrying about; the magnificent ballroom of the château was put to a base use; all the tapestries had been removed and the great mirrors were starred by bullets; cases were being packed or unpacked, and noise and disorder reigned. Suddenly a door above, giving on to a balcony, was opened with extreme violence; doubtless in happy times the orchestra played here, and the guests of the château danced in the splendid ballroom below, reflected again and again in the great mirrors. A stout German officer, his head shaved to the skin, burst through the door on to the balcony, and, leaning over the gilded balustrades, yelled "Silence!" — an order hardly necessary to voice, as his mere presence had effectually silenced the noisy crowd below.

The German glared down on the people; then, raising his revolver, he deliberately fired into a corner, where the men were massed; after that, giving a satisfied grunt, he withdrew. Miss Pim stiffened with horror; the bullet had whistled past her head and buried itself in the chest of a young soldier; he gave one cough and fell dead. Miss Pim fled from the room, and hurriedly mounted the branching staircase of white stone, and, opening one side of the great folding doors, slipped into the immense salon over the ballroom. Here, at table, sat fifteen German

officers; amongst them the murderer she had seen on the balcony. They were loudly drinking soup, and looked up at the opening door, which Miss Pim closed behind her.

"You thought that was the ghost of the man you shot, eh, Konrad?"

"Ach! the fellow is n't dead. I just gave him a lesson in manners; they all want teaching."

The General, a lean, savage-looking man, called out: —

"Colonel Konrad, I don't like your discipline. I hear the man Brunnen was popular; this will make trouble. The soldiers are less disciplined every day, and this sort of discipline of yours may lead to mutiny."

"You told me to obtain silence," said Colonel Konrad, sulkily, wiping his mustache.

"Not by killing the men," retorted the General sternly.

"A man more or less, General," began the Colonel.

"I tell you, Brunnen was popular," said the General severely. "I never liked the fellow myself. I hear he was a Socialist, but it is not *politik* to kill him; there has been a lot of restiveness amongst the men to-day; it is reported your men ran away this evening from *voices*. Hell and thunder, Konrad, this won't do — Germans running away from voices."

"But the men will have it, General, that they heard ghostly voices," said a young Staff officer eagerly. "It began over a girl —"

"I won't have this sort of thing going on," shouted the General, banging the table with his fist till the glasses rang. "Send for the Corporal who was in charge of that particular lot."

The officers looked bored; they were hungry, and a roast goose banked round with sausages was being brought in. How annoying the General could be! The Corporal stood at attention.

"What is this nonsense about voices?" asked the General abruptly. The Corporal's eyes rolled. "Speak or you shall be punished."

"My General, it is true. We all heard a voice this evening in the village. That shameless girl Chaudet was being — disciplined by Sergeant Krauss, when Brunnen, the late Hans Brunnen, came up and threatened Krauss and tried to free the girl. Suddenly a voice spoke all round us, saying we were doomed, that we were lost, that we had no right to kill women and children —"

"That was Brunnen — he was doubtless a ventriloquist; he did it to frighten you; go and tell the men that he was able to throw his voice anywhere, but he is dead now, and a good riddance; the men won't hear any more voices; if they do, they must

be punished. See that they stand their ground. What are German soldiers coming to? Hell and thunder!"

Then Miss Pim raised her voice. "You are doomed! Every man of you will die very soon, and you will be punished for your cruelty and wickedness. You are doomed — doomed!"

The Corporal gave a howl, and straightway fled from the room, followed by the soldiers waiting, with the plates, and the man about to carve the succulent goose. Another fellow dropped a bottle of champagne and tore after the others. Several officers rose from their seats with pale faces and twitching nostrils, but Colonel Konrad completely collapsed, and commenced crying like a small boy. The General, who was rather deaf, did not understand this sudden madness. He sat there in such a fury he was literally speechless. He looked at Konrad, whose face was buried in a table napkin, and at the perturbed officers, and with tremendous self-control he said: —

"Ring for the dinner."

Miss Pim quickly approached the sideboard, snatched up several large serviettes in which she wrapped the goose, the sausages, and the potatoes, also a big loaf of bread. She pulled four large candles from the candelabra, seized two bottles of champagne, and decamped. Rushing down the village, she made her way to the back of the houses, finding

at last the house where she had delivered the message of hope. The inmates were sitting on the doorstep, whispering together, with the neighbours. Miss Pim made herself visible, and beckoning to the women, she displayed a corner of the loaf and the end of a sausage.

"Quick, you must give a banquet. Here is a goose and sausages, a big loaf and potatoes. All for you, Madame, but you will share with your neighbours, I am sure. And a little champagne to drink the health of the Allied Armies. Bon soir, mes amis!" And Miss Pim glided away, down the village highway, supperless.

"I must get a little bread and wine," she thought, "or I shall not sleep." And, seeing a light in what had been the *presbytère*, she looked in. Here a few young German subalterns were smoking; bottles of wine were on the table. Miss Pim, becoming invisible, let herself in quietly. No one noticed her entrance. She seated herself in a corner, and with a thick slice of tolerable bread and a glass of claret, she made her humble meal. The officers were talking in a low voice; one was writing to his fiancée in the Black Forest. Miss Pim, satisfied, rose, and fetching a pillow and a quilt from an upper room, strolled out into the soft night — starlit with a new moon, just a curved slip, rocking on its back. Miss Pim was so weary she could

hardly drag her tired feet. She determined to sleep beyond the village, in a little wood, reached through fields of young barley and meadows of lush grass. She wandered awhile in the wood trying to find a suitable spot, and at last, in the shadow of a granite boulder, and beneath a thick-leaved chestnut tree, Miss Pim laid herself down to sleep, after recommending her body and soul to the care of Almighty God. Covered by the down quilt, her head on a redundant pillow, Miss Pim soon slept as deeply and soundly as in her pretty bedroom at Froghurst Manor.

CHAPTER X

She awoke in morning sunshine to the prattle of children; two little mites were peeping at her from behind the granite boulder. When she opened her eyes they shrank back like frightened mice. Miss Pim sat up and called to them, smiling, letting down her still abundant hair, which she brushed vigorously. This homely act proved reassuring; the two very young children crept doubtfully towards her, and sat down solemnly at a safe distance to watch the strange woman doing her toilet in the woods. The elder girl, about six years of age, carried a patchwork bag in which rattled a few acorns, and some thin white roots, which she drew out and commenced gnawing. Miss Pim noted the unhealthy pallor of their skin, the emaciation of legs and arms. This was starvation indeed. She brought out a packet of chocolate from her bag and held out two pieces. The children shrank back.

"Chocolate," said Miss Pim, — "chocolate for dear little girls."

They wriggled a little nearer.

"Is it good to eat?" whispered the elder girl.

Again Miss Pim felt a shock; these little ones were

too young to remember pre-war days when French children ate chocolate.

"Yes, this is very good; goûtez," persisted Miss Pim.

Two claw-like, dirty little hands were put up, then as suddenly drawn back. "Non, non, it is poison," said the elder girl. "Jeannette, you must not take it."

Miss Pim was horrified. "Oh, you poor children, how can you even think of such a thing?" she cried.

"The wicked Boches drop poison bonbons from aeroplanes," replied the elder child gravely. "Mother says we must never eat what they give us."

"But I am not German — I am English. We love little children, and we are coming to save all the mothers and fathers and children here."

The little girls looked wise and doubtful, but when they saw Miss Pim eating, they again put out their hands. This time the chocolate found its way to the baby mouths; but again the elder sister put up a warning hand. "Jeannette, give me that gâteau," she said gravely.

Miss Pim began to feel indignant. "Your little sister is hungry, let her eat, it is very good."

"It is very good, and I *am* hungry," said the mite, giving up the chocolate to her sister Marthe.

"Why do you take it from poor little Jeannette?" asked Miss Pim almost tearfully.

"Maman is hungry, and petit frère is hungry," said Marthe, with a little twist of the mouth, as of repressed grief.

"Oh, you poor dear little things! Eat what you have, and I will give you the rest of this packet, and some money for your mother."

In happy confidence the children now sat quite close to Miss Pim; they stroked her dress, and Jeannette even kissed the bag which had carried that wonderful chocolate.

"Are the Boches all wicked and cruel?" asked Miss Pim.

"They are very bad people," said Marthe emphatically; "they like breaking things and burning things. They hurt people and laugh."

Little Jeannette, licking her fingers carefully, repeated, —

"They hurt people and laugh."

"They like to make little children cry," continued Marthe, "because children cannot strike back. . . . They killed Madame Veuve Bouchon, because she struck a Boche. Little children cannot strike."

"But I could bite," said wee Jeannette, opening her mouth wide and showing her little white teeth; "petit Henri bit the Boche who killed their dog Azor."

"Tais-toi! You must n't bite the Germans, but

run — run and hide when you see them — they like killing little children. Oh! long ago, when I was young, when they first came here, Mother says they killed babies, no bigger than petit frère. Mother says that is better than taking them away. They have taken away Marie Dupont, a big girl —"

"And Anne Marie Dumas," chimed in Jeannette.

"Yes, and Nicolette Leroi; they took them away, away from their mammas. They cried, — oh! how they cried! — and the Boches laughed. Madame, they are very wicked people; if they see you they will kill you."

"Yes," reëchoed Jeannette, licking the paper the chocolate had been wrapped in, "yes, they will kill you, and then they will laugh and sing."

"If Madame has nothing more to give us we will go back to Maman," said Marthe sedately.

The chocolate and the money were fastened in some recess of Marthe's ragged bodice with a crooked pin, and very softly the two little girls slipped away behind the granite boulder.

Miss Pim turned back to her bag. She replaced her hair-brush, and then fastened her rucksack to her shoulders. A shadow fell across the rock; looking up she saw a huge German soldier.

"Ach — zo!" he exclaimed. Here was a prize. A spy, a woman, unarmed! What a chance for Hans!

What a story to tell! Perhaps a reward, and perhaps even promotion! He looked at Miss Pim very much as a Bengal tiger would look at a tethered kid. And Perdita for a moment lost her head completely. She looked round. Where could she fly? Would the man shoot? Hans was enjoying himself immensely; he liked to see that hunted, terrified look in a woman's eyes. He did not want to shoot her, though he might bayonet her if she gave trouble, but he much preferred her alive. She was his lawful prey, to drag before his colonel, as a retriever might bring a partridge. Still, there was no reason why he should not get some fun before handing her over.

Miss Pim was seated on the ground, the man stood, arms akimbo, leering down at her. He touched her with his big boot, — she shrank back; he turned her bag over with the toe of his boot, — she snatched it up. "There is money in the bag," thought Hans, "and that I shall keep."

"Here, hand over the bag, and the sack on your shoulders," cried Hans. It was fun to see his victim press herself against the stone. Himmel! how easy it would be to run her through — perhaps, if she had money, that would be best — run her through the body and leave her there. Whilst these thoughts took shape in his slow-working brain, Miss Pim, re-

covering herself, bent her head back and disappeared, but remained immovably pressed against the boulder, staring up at the blank face of Hans, who glared at her with unseeing eyes. Where she had been was a blur — but his prey, his victim, his fortune had disappeared. He shook himself like a bull. The veins of his throat swelled, and he gave the raucous cry of a baffled brute — dashing round the rock with bayonet fixed. He ran here and there, quite maddened by disappointment; then he called comrades, and soon five or six soldiers were beating the wood.

Miss Pim rose, and, as gently as she could, made her way out of the wood, leaving Monsieur le Curé's large pillow and down quilt under the chestnut tree. When she remembered, she really felt too nervous to return and restore them to their owner. Quickly Miss Pim sped away from the village of Jussy le Duc. Her object was to reach Valenciennes and thence, through Belgium, into Germany. But how she was to get anywhere was the problem. A walking tour through Belgium and Germany was not in the programme; it would involve great fatigue and privations, and be valueless from a military point of view.

Just at this moment Miss Pim's thoughts were centred on hot coffee. So long as she remained in France and Belgium food would be difficult to

obtain, since she could not bring herself to take so much as a mouthful from the people of the country. "It looks as though I must always join the officers' mess," thought Miss Pim with a sigh, and it was at Headquarters she must glean information and carry off maps and documents. The sun was now high overhead; the roads were inches deep in dust, for the heavy traffic had quite broken up the metal of the roads. Miss Pim looked anxiously about, the road was so very long, and there was no sign of an inn.

At last she came up with a military wagon; the driver had got down to adjust a chain on the wheel, preparatory to a steep descent. Miss Pim caught hold of a rope and with great difficulty hauled herself into the wagon, which was packed with cases. A good many men lay sleeping on the boxes, and grunted as Miss Pim scrambled over them to an unoccupied corner; there she opened her bag and spread some potted meat on a stale roll. It was not a satisfying meal, and the wagon bumped painfully, but the cover was some protection from the sun and the food restored her. Two young soldiers were talking of the war; small men, with a broad Slav type of head, gentle-looking animals with mild blue eyes.

They talked of the fighting on the British front, in tremulous gutturals. "They are terrible, those soldiers; they give you no rest, they kill you every-

where — underground, overhead, all round, there is no escape. I tried to get over to those British devils; I hear they feed you well and are kind, and you need not work or fight any more. Ach! I hope next time to be taken."

"Some of our boys shot their captain and got across to the British," said the other young soldier.

"It seems the only thing to do," said the first pensively. "Otherwise we are bound to end in the Corpse Fat Factory. I don't know when I shall marry Lena," he continued. "We have been betrothed three years or more. Are you betrothed?"

"Yes; to a girl at Charlottenburg. I have not been engaged so long as you. I fixed it up when I was last home, wounded. See! I have her picture. She has sweet eyes, appealing eyes, like a girl I had to bayonet in France in 1914. I did not mind killing the father or the mother, but she had such appealing eyes; I suffered when I ran her through."

"So you are betrothed to this girl as a sort of reparation," said the other, laughing.

"Well! something of the sort," said the young German, kissing the photograph before he replaced it in an inner pocket.

Miss Pim shuddered; her sense of repulsion for these savage brutes caused her a sensation of physical nausea. Decidedly she must frighten them off

the wagon. So, leaning forward in their direction, she said, slowly and clearly, in German: "You killed my father, you killed my mother, and then you killed me. Shall you escape punishment?"

Wide-eyed with terror, the young soldiers looked at each other. "Did you hear that — voice?"

"Yes, I heard the girl; it was the girl you killed. She spoke."

"And I say no," shouted the other, white as chalk; "it was the bolt on the wheel you heard."

"You killed my father, you killed my mother, and then you killed me; we had never harmed you, we were helpless," cried Miss Pim, her voice shaking with emotion.

The two men waited for no more; tumbling over their companions, they hurled themselves out on to the road, and the last Miss Pim saw of them was sitting up in the white dust, staring at the receding wagon.

CHAPTER XI

The heat and dust were trying, the hood over the cart kept away the air, and Miss Pim was very uncomfortably placed between two cases which jolted about on the floor of the wagon. She determined to get out at the first stopping-place, an *auberge*, with a *tonnelle*, — that is to say, a little arbour of vines, — where four German officers sat at dinner, a very ample dinner, judging by their cheerful red faces as they parted the greenery and looked out. Miss Pim did not hesitate; she walked round to the entrance of the bower and examined the dishes. A pile of spotted trout had been devoured, washed down by the best of white wine. "I must wait for the next course," she said to herself, "but white bread and wine are not to be despised." So she reached forward and snatched up a bottle and a hunch of bread. The men looked round, momentarily puzzled, and then resumed their conversation. Soon the poor old innkeeper returned with a dish of *omelette au rognons*. The officers, delighted, forced him to drink a glass of his own wine, and then proceeded to portion out the omelette. Miss Pim watched her opportunity, seized one of the plates, which she carried off to a low wall,

where she sat with the bread under one arm, the bottle of wine under the other, and the plate on her lap, because, of course, anything she was not touching became visible.

Much revived by the food and wine, she determined to wait for some more comfortable vehicle to take her to Valenciennes.

At last the Germans came out of the vine arbour, straightening their uniforms, and resuming their military scowls. Profoundly bowing, two of them went off, followed by Miss Pim, who saw them start in a small two-seated motor car, their luggage tied on at the back. "No possibility of a lift," thought Miss Pim; and besides, they were soon whirling off in a cloud of dust, back the same weary way she had travelled that morning.

The other officers were older and more important-looking. Perhaps they would have a car with four seats; going into a shed, Miss Pim saw a fine Mercédès with six seats. No sooner had she climbed into the back than the officers strolled up smoking, followed by the innkeeper lugging a hamper. Miss Pim could hear the bottles chinking together, the whole contents of the poor man's little cellar. Miss Pim could see his wife crying at the back door, as the big basket was lifted on to the seat beside her, and fastened by a rope to the back rail. The officers jumped in, and

soon, to her relief, she was speeding along to Valenciennes.

The food, wine, and fresh air soon sent her to sleep, a deep, refreshing sleep from which she was rudely awakened by a violent shaking.

"Good gracious, what is the matter?" she cried, putting up her hand to save her hat.

Angry voices and excited German officers crowded round the car made it clear that she was discovered. Sleep and the jolting of the car at high speed had restored Miss Pim's visibility.

"Have we reached Valenciennes?" she asked sleepily?

"There, now, I told you she was an Englishwoman. She is a spy, that's certain," cried a young German with whitish hair, and the complexion of a pink ivy geranium. "Shoot her in the car."

"What! make a mess in my new car! Never!" cried the Captain, laughing. "We'll have the woman safely locked up, and handed over to the Colonel when he arrives this evening. Two of you fellows jump in, and hold her, one on each side. In half an hour we shall be in Valenciennes."

Miss Pim was not unduly alarmed, but she blamed herself for carelessness. To have allowed herself to succumb to sleep in such circumstances was culpable folly. Her handbag and her rucksack had been taken

from her, and she was held in a ferocious grip, but, confident of ultimate escape, she was able to smile at the excited young officers.

"Don't be afraid; I have no intention of escaping here; you hurt my arms quite needlessly."

"What does she say?" asked the white-haired youth, his eyes bulging with excitement.

"I said you need not be so frightened," replied Miss Pim in German, smiling.

"You are an English spy. Confess!" cried the young man.

Miss Pim turned to the other officer, who understood English, and said, "When my belongings have been examined, will they be returned to me?"

"You will not require them," he replied sourly. "After the Colonel has questioned you, you will require nothing."

"Dear me, how obliging your Colonel must be! Do you think he would lend me a car and a chauffeur? This car would do to take me to Berlin."

"To Berlin! Lend you a car to take you to Berlin!" spluttered the officer in amazement. "What for? Why were you attempting to visit our capital?"

"I wanted to interview the Kaiser, and Hindenburg. I wanted to — to look round."

"What does she say, Heinrich? What does the mad Englishwoman say?" asked the pink youth eagerly.

"Oh, nothing much. She merely intends to interview the All Highest, and Von Hindenburg."

"Yes, and the Crown Prince," interposed Miss Pim.

"Oh, you English!" murmured the Captain; "it really is impossible to understand such a people. I suppose it is your climate; you are not serious, you think only of sport and enjoyment; you grew tired of hunting foxes, so you determined to annihilate Germans for sport. That explains your reason for assassinating the Austrian Crown Prince. It is all England's brutal egoism."

"So you have never visited England, though you speak excellent English?" remarked Miss Pim, still smiling.

The Captain eagerly assured her that he had lived with an English family for six months. "When I was twenty I went to perfect my knowledge of the language; I stayed with a family called Johnson, near Basingstoke, a very nice family. There was Miss Alice Johnson, — oh, she was beautiful, — and Edward her brother, a great cricketer. I used to play; we had matches." The Captain's face lit up at his recollection of the Johnson family.

"And they treated you well?"

"Yes; it was a happy time. I liked the English then, but I was young and impressionable; besides,

I did not then realise the base, calculating spirit which is dominant in England; they could not endure to see German strength, industry, and prosperity, so they attacked us, a peace-loving people, hoping to destroy us, and gain the dominion of the world. But why am I wasting my words on you — miserable woman, fated to die this day!"

"But you will allow that I am courageous," said Miss Pim sweetly.

The German Captain looked at her steadily; then with some reluctance he admitted that the British did not lack courage. "But it will avail you nothing with our Colonel; indeed, I am sorry that you are to be handed over to him; our Colonel can be terrible, especially after he has had much to drink. I don't believe in pity myself; I resist sentimental weakness; war demands frightfulness," continued the Captain. "It is necessary to have no scruples — but — the Colonel!"

"Ah, Captain, I think you are better than your talk. And I believe you are just a little bit sorry for me," said Miss Pim, laughing.

The German Captain looked uncomfortable. "I am sorry, because Colonel von Schlange is ruthless and very cruel. You do not deny that you are a spy and you ought, of course, to die, but I dislike torturing women. If the Colonel shoots you before supper,

that will be all right, but after supper he would — amuse himself first by torturing you, and I shall have to be present. No, I cannot at the bottom of my heart approve of torture."

Miss Pim felt a shiver play over her. "Captain, tell me your name. I am willing to bet you a pound of good chocolate that your ferocious Colonel neither tortures nor shoots me."

"My name is Captain Wirtheim; and pray, what is your name?"

Miss Pim paused a second, then said: "Jane Barton, Miss Jane Barton."

"Miss Barton, you are English, therefore you are brave and foolish, you make a sport of death, and bet me a pound of chocolate; it is dreadful."

"Dreadful, Captain Wirtheim, because, if you win, I shall, you think, be unable to pay. But in my rucksack there is some excellent chocolate; that is what troubles me, the loss of my chocolate and Bovril and other comforts."

All this time the pink lieutenant had fiercely gripped her arm, but the Captain was not even holding her. However, now that they were entering Valenciennes, he put his hand on her arm.

"Good-bye, Fräulein, it is a pity you came here; you have accomplished nothing and you are fated to die."

"Well, Captain, I have to thank you for making my little journey quite pleasant. I hope, when you are a prisoner of the British, you will change your mind about us; you will see that we never ill-treat our prisoners as you do."

Miss Pim was taken to the Old Musée on the *place*, now the Army Headquarters, and locked up in a fine room of the old palace. She was troubled at the loss of her maps and various small belongings she could not replace. The great windows looked out on the long *place*, which, in spite of German Law, Order, and Punishment, retained its French aspect. German soldiers stalked about, German aeroplanes flew overhead, but Valenciennes retained its French character.

"I wonder what they think they will do to me," thought Miss Pim. It was risky remaining visible, but she wished to interview this deadly Colonel before disappearing. "In olden times, I suppose, they would have been preparing the stake for me, down there, faggots, heaped up round a stout post to which Perdita Pim would have been chained. From all accounts these Germans are just as savage and inhuman to-day. How disappointed they will be to lose their victim!"

Her reflections were interrupted by the violent throwing open of folding doors; four German soldiers

surrounded her, and in harsh gutturals ordered her to follow the pink-faced young officer, goose-stepping in front. This absurd little procession marched along a corridor and they entered a room of noble proportions, furnished with stately old French furniture, supplemented by common modern stuff.

At a large table, laden with papers neatly docketed, sat a German officer, Colonel von Schlange. He never once looked up at Miss Pim, but continued writing quickly, sheet after sheet. The pink officer stood very erect and immovable, the four soldiers might have been carved in wood. Miss Pim was curious to see the face of this formidable colonel, but she could only make out a round bald patch on the top of a small head. "If this goes on much longer," thought Miss Pim, "I shall laugh or shout. It's all pose; the wretch thinks he is terrifying me."

After a long wait she said to the Lieutenant, in a peremptory voice: "Fetch me a chair."

The young man looked at her, startled, and then at the Colonel, who put down his pen and raised his head; and Miss Pim looked into the most sinister, the most truly evil, countenance she had ever seen. It was worse than a face dreamed of in a dreadful nightmare. The head was small and flat, the eyes close together and black. A large brushlike mustache spread out under a thin nose with dilated nos-

trils. The pallid face was fretted with minute wrinkles as though it had been steeped in hot water. But it was the degradation of a human countenance that most struck Miss Pim; this creature was capable of anything evil and unnatural; the word "monster" best described him. "Now I understand the German conduct in Belgium and France," she thought.

Like a reptile the Colonel raised his head, and his black eyes met the honest eyes of the Englishwoman. Then they shifted and in a rapid, harsh tone he gave orders.

Miss Pim was pushed towards the table where he sat, and tumbled on to a chair. The soldiers tramped out, and Colonel von Schlange and Miss Pim faced each other. Before a word was spoken the man opened a drawer and took out two large revolvers, which he placed carefully before him. Then he opened another drawer and produced her rucksack and handbag, and carefully opening the latter, he brought out the maps. Folding his hairy yellow hands on them, he leant forward with a curiously cruel look of enjoyment and, in perfect English, he said slowly: "These are your possessions?"

Miss Pim was so fascinated by this extraordinary man that she failed to answer; she felt herself in the first row of the stalls, looking on at a melodrama.

"You do not answer; you are wise; I understand

you are a self-confessed spy. We have a short way with spies, Miss Jane Barton, but before your career is put an end to, I have to know something about those who sent you. Who gave you these — exceedingly interesting maps? You will give me some information about the disposition of the British troops. Ha, ha, this is what you call the 'Biter bit.' Now proceed, make a full confession, without delay; if not —"

"If not?" repeated Miss Pim, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on the Colonel's shifty eyes.

"You will be — dealt with —"

"Yes, I know, you hope to have me shot," said Miss Pim calmly. "But that you intend doing whether I speak or not."

"Certainly you will be shot, in any case; but if you do not speak, painful methods will be employed."

"You mean torture?"

"Oh, Miss Barton, why use that expression? We shall take the necessary means to make you talk. You seem cool and self-possessed; that will be broken down by a certain potion calculated to unnerve you."

It would be impossible to describe the evil joy that lit up the countenance of the fiend as he spoke, but the satanic delight soon gave way to savage anger. Miss Pim faced him without fear, and the loathing

and contempt she felt, she showed. She realised that she had a low type of coward before her.

"Colonel von Schlange," said Miss Pim, "even for a German, you are a bad type. I defy you; I shall confess nothing. I shall not 'talk' as you call it, nor will I drink your nerve-breaking potion."

Toying nervously with a revolver, Von Schlange leant forward, and poured forth a stream of the vilest remarks, unclean, foul, gross words, many of them unintelligible to the English lady who sat there. He hissed out obscene threats which seemed to stain him; his face grew blotchy and swelled like the freckled belly of a toad. Gasping for breath, he leant back. Miss Pim eyed him with ineffable contempt. "You unclean little reptile," was all she vouchsafed; whereupon the Colonel reared, exactly like a cobra, and fired his revolver. Miss Pim had expected this from the moment he had taken it up. She dipped her head down to her lap, and the bullet passed over and struck a mirror. The report and crash of glass brought three officers running in from the adjoining room — Captain Wirtheim, the pink-faced Lieutenant, and another.

"This woman tried to shoot me!" shouted Von Schlange, forgetting that he still held the smoking revolver. "Have her taken into the courtyard below and have her flogged in the presence of as many sol-

diers as can be got into the yard. She will be shot at dawn. Till then she will undergo — various other penalties. Call in the men."

Miss Pim now decided that it was time to disappear. She could hear the tramp of the men approaching. A moment of mental anguish well-nigh overcame her, fearing lest she might fail; but the wave of horror passed, she pressed her head back and was to all appearance — no longer there. Quietly she slipped out of the chair and took refuge in a small space between a writing bureau and a lacquer cabinet. She was careful to touch neither the wall nor the furniture, so that the room might retain its usual appearance. Wide-eyed and with quickened pulse, she noted the stupid bewilderment on all the faces — on Captain Wirtheim's she thought she detected relief.

The Colonel was quite hysterical, he ran round and round the room brandishing the revolver, shouting: "Seize her! Shoot her! Kill her! Flog her!" And only when he perceived a glint of amusement on the faces of the soldiers at the door did he recover some appearance of self-control.

"A dangerous female spy has escaped — she must be concealed in the building, let it be searched — Valenciennes must be searched! A proclamation must immediately be printed, and criers must go

through the streets announcing that any one harbouring the Englishwoman will be burnt alive. There is no security unless we are pitiless; an example must be made. That woman shall be —"

Then, remembering that a cool attitude befitted his rank, he passed a trembling hairy hand over his face.

"Come, gentlemen, which of you saw the woman slip out?"

"My Colonel, I did not see the woman escape," said Captain Wirtheim.

"Neither did I," said each of the other officers.

"This is very discreditable," said Colonel von Schlange, "and if the woman is not found in twenty-four hours it will go hard with you."

The young officers saluted and withdrew, leaving Von Schlange alone. Miss Pim kept her eyes on the table; her one thought was to get possession of her two precious bags and the maps. If she left without them, she could hardly hope to recover them later. Germans are nothing if not methodical; in a few minutes the Colonel would put the things safely away under lock and key and they would be lost to her. Von Schlange walked to a mirror, where he attentively examined himself, and Miss Pim tiptoed towards the table. Some slight sound made the Colonel turn quickly, but nothing moved; he sighed

and took out a pocket comb which he tenderly applied to his mustache. Again Miss Pim advanced, scarcely breathing. She gently lifted both the bags, and then took up the folded maps. Seeing the sheets the Colonel had been writing, in a neat pile by the inkstand and a packet of documents, she gathered them up, opened her handbag and slipped them in. This time Von Schlange was certain he had heard a movement in the room. He looked round rather wildly, then darted to the table. Miss Pim snatched up the other revolver and backed to the door. The Colonel was clearly overcome with rage and apprehension.

Miss Pim dared not wait a moment longer, lest she should find the officers hurrying in or the Colonel bolting out. She opened the door and fled, racing along the corridor, down the staircase, and out into a damp, dreary courtyard, where, doubtless, her execution was to have taken place. The great entrance had been closed to prevent her escape. Perdita was beginning to feel herself trapped. She ran through an arched doorway down a dark passage and entered a guard-room. Soldiers were laughing boisterously; one young fellow was imitating Colonel von Schlange, waving his arms and shouting: "Valenciennes must be searched — an example must be made," etc.

"Ach, Franz, that is enough; if it got to the ears of the Colonel that we made fun of him, he would gladly shoot us; cease fooling, man."

"Well," said Franz, smiling, "I am off for beer. I know a nice little maiden who will have to supply me with 'bocks,' one — two — three, and she will have kisses one — two — and three."

Miss Pim determined to follow Franz and get out of this dangerous building as soon as possible. Two sentries at a back door challenged the young German with a grin, and Miss Pim passed out into the *place*.

Twilight was deepening into night, but there were great flares of light at the wine and beer shops. German soldiers strolled about swaggering and scowling, the smaller fry imitating their officers. A beautiful band was playing outside a *brasserie*. Miss Pim stopped to listen. How could Germans hear such music and be such terrible brutes! She looked in at the hall and noted the youthfulness of the majority — big, square, heavy boys, mostly fair-haired: it looked as though they had been bred to order, as though a slow-witted animal type had been in demand, and the nation, obediently, had turned them out by the hundred thousand — men who must needs march together, or run away; men with the characteristics of droves of cattle; men who could be trusted neither to think nor to ask questions; men

who would fight, murder, sack, loot, or violate, as occasion arose, and, dead, would produce glycerine and engine grease in the Corpse Fat Factory. Germany had organised well, and produced the type she required for her particular purpose.

CHAPTER XII

WEARY, hungry, and sick at heart, Miss Pim found her way to the Hôtel de France, the chief hotel in Valenciennes. She hoped to find some unoccupied room, where she could sleep in a comfortable bed in comparative security. There was much coming and going, and some unusual bustle. In the largest room of the hotel a long table was spread with fruit and flowers; evidently a banquet was about to begin. The hotel proprietor, a haggard, middle-aged man, was anxiously bowing to officers as they entered, and directing them to the salon. Curiosity led Miss Pim to follow them, and she found the banquet was to be given by Colonel von Schlange, as a welcome to officers just arrived from the eastern front. Too weary to linger, Miss Pim now explored the bedrooms on every floor; the rooms were evidently all engaged. Miss Pim wondered where she could find rest; at the end of a passage she saw a ladder, up which she crawled, and found herself in another long passage. Walking cautiously along, feeling the walls with her hands, she came to a table, and groping anxiously was rewarded by finding a tin candlestick with a new candle

in it, and a box of sulphur matches in the big saucer of the candlestick.

She now examined a perfect warren of small bedrooms, and could take her choice, as most of them were unoccupied. She selected one of two, in an angle, with a window opening on to the roof; a bed, a chair, a tin basin on a table were furniture enough; the door had a stout bolt and a big key. She discovered one of those cupboards in the wall called a *placard*, so usual in old French houses, and nearly always papered or painted to resemble the wall. Here she stowed away her bags and her hat, changed her boots for light shoes, and then boldly reconnoitred for water. The dripping from a tap hard by enabled her to fill the tin basin, and soon she was refreshed by scented soap and a thorough hair-brushing, but, still feeling nervous, Miss Pim dared not undress: she lay down on the little bed and fell into a dreamless sleep, awakening some two hours later with a start. The night air came in gentle gusts through the open skylight, the stars burned and vibrated with extraordinary intensity. Miss Pim lay there some time, reviewing the events of the day. Calm and refreshed by sleep, she now began to feel very hungry. Her lunch had been sketchy, — a small piece of omelette and a slice of bread could hardly prove satisfying for many hours. Miss Pim decided to go down and

forage for herself; she ought to pick up some crumbs from Von Schlange's banquet. Carefully noting the position of her room, she cautiously descended; the loud voices, the singing and toasting, testified to the free flow of champagne in the banqueting-hall. Very red-faced, tunics loosened, the Germans sat at the long table. Von Schlange, though very far gone, still kept up appearances. The pink Lieutenant, smiling and foolish, was pouring champagne into the open mouth of a snoring companion. Captain Wirtheim was drinking and weeping. Others were making speeches, or crying "Hoch! Hoch!" at intervals. One man was clumsily dancing.

"What is that fool doing?" shouted Von Schlange. "Dancing! Germans don't dance without women. Send for those girls."

"What girls, Your Excellency?" asked the proprietor, trembling, for only too well he knew to what girls Von Schlange referred. Some fifteen young French maidens, torn from their homes in neighbouring villages, and even far beyond, had arrived at Valenciennes that very evening, and were to be packed off to Germany into so-called service — a euphemism for the basest slavery imaginable. The unfortunate girls had been locked up in a room in the hotel awaiting a troop train, which was to leave at dawn. Monsieur Dubois, the hotel proprietor, stam-

mered and objected that if "His Excellency meant the children just arrived, they were in no state to appear before ces messieurs."

"Hold your tongue," said Von Schlange, slowly and thickly. "You will be shot if the girls are not here in five minutes."

A silence fell over the assembly. A lot of French girls would make a jolly wind-up of the banquet. "They are more elegant than Russian girls," whispered one of the officers from the Galician front.

They came, a weeping crowd. Miss Pim stood in the room as they entered, clinging to each other, children of fourteen, fine young girls of seventeen and eighteen, their faces convulsed by terror and grief. Some carried little travelling-bags; others clutched small bundles; all seemed expectant of a terrible fate.

Von Schlange rose majestically, and, pointing to the girls, he shouted: —

"They are to go out and undress; let them return without clothing. German officers wish to contemplate beauty unadorned. Clothed like that — ach! they are frightful!"

He swayed slightly, then sat down suddenly. The girls scuttled out of the room like terrified lambs from a slaughter-house and crouched trembling in the passage. Miss Pim straightened herself, resuming visibility, and approached the children.

"Fly, mes enfants, just as you are, fly to your homes, and conceal yourselves, you who have homes in Valenciennes; hide for the night, those who live in the country. I will give those devils something else to think about."

Leading the terrified children to the entrance she saw them scatter in the darkness. Turning, she met the proprietor.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Do you know this means our death — yours and mine?"

"Better so, Monsieur, than the dishonour of all these little ones. I am an Englishwoman: You go away and hide yourself. Leave me to manage these German brutes; they are all so drunk they will forget to-morrow what happened."

"But, Madame, alone with those demons, — no, it is not possible."

"Do as I order," said Miss Pim hurriedly. And she walked quietly into the banqueting-room.

Von Schlange saw her first, but, realising he was drunk, he thought it must be some hallucination. He clutched the table with his hairy paws and swallowed repeatedly. Miss Pim walked straight up to the side of his chair. He turned his flat head and their eyes met, and the look she gave partly sobered him. A curious silence fell on the assembly, only broken by the resounding slaps showered on the snake's face.

Miss Pim struck hard; then, snatching up the glass of champagne, she smashed it in his face, blood and champagne streaming down his uniform.

"The spy! The English devil woman! Shoot her. Mein Gott! I have not my revolver, gentlemen. Shoot! Shoot!" yelled Von Schlange, as Miss Pim flew to the door and extinguished all the electric lights, the switches being just outside, and in less time than it takes to relate she turned the key on the furious officers.

Seeing Monsieur Dubois wringing his hands, she said:—

"Monsieur, you must deliver them. They know whom to thank for this evening's work, and if you only assure them that you saw a mad Englishwoman rushing out of the hotel, and that you tried to seize her, they will not shoot you. Besides, Monsieur, yours is the only good hotel. Von Schlange will not kill you. Give me time to get away; when I have gone, open to them."

"Go quickly, then, Madame; otherwise my doors will be smashed. Ah, mon Dieu! there go the windows!"

Miss Pim rushed out, returning a few moments later when she had made herself invisible. Determined to get food somehow, she reconnoitred the kitchen and larder, where she found the remains of

a roast chicken and a little black bread, and soon she was scrambling up the ladder to her room, taking the precaution to lock and bolt the door in case search were made. This fear of being caught in her sleep made her get out her shoulder-bag, her handbag, her jacket, and hat. All these things she placed on a chair beside the bed, and waited some time with a fast-beating heart. Then, hearing nothing, she stole to the ladder-head and listened, and as quietly crept back, undressed, and slept profoundly and long.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning Miss Pim was horrified to learn that Monsieur Dubois and his wife had been shot, and that their two daughters had been forced to attend the execution. The girls were told that their lives would be spared if they revealed the hiding-place of the English spy; as they were unable to do so, they were tortured, outraged, and shot. Miss Pim felt herself a danger to the unhappy inhabitants; she had hoped to save many unfortunate young girls, but had done so only at the cost of four innocent lives, and it was probable that all the girls would be recaptured. Profoundly distressed, she made her way to the station. It was hopeless to attempt boarding a passenger train; there were very few, and the crowding by soldiers and civilians made it difficult to get standing room. Miss Pim was surprised at the condition of the carriages: the paint blistered and cracked, the windows so dirty that no one could look out of or into the compartments; the engines were rusty, the wheels creaked, and all the trains appeared thoroughly dilapidated. After waiting hours, Miss Pim decided to board a goods train labelled "Aachen," — open trucks laden with rough cases and hampers.

Scrambling up with difficulty, for Miss Pim was past the age of agility, she settled herself on a large basket between cases, and before long the train moved out and Miss Pim felt that she was now fairly launched for Germany. But there was another unaccountable stoppage. Were they going to search the train for the English spy? How imprudent she had been to mention Berlin as her objective. Still, after all, was she not quite safe, even should they make a search? At last the long delay was explained: six more trucks were being shunted out of the station and were attached with a rough jar to Miss Pim's train. "More cases," thought she. "I wonder what they can be sending back into Germany." But the six trucks were carefully tucked over with tarpaulin covers. Miss Pim looked at the label on the basket upon which she sat; it was addressed to "Frau Doktorin Gunther, 9 Bahnstrasse, Charlottenburg." It had been crammed so full that the cover was several inches from the basket and tied in and out with coarse string. Miss Pim, whose besetting sin was curiosity, determined thoroughly to examine the contents of this basket, which looked to her very like loot. Cutting the string at one end, she carefully unlaced it, and the open basket revealed a bundle of linen. This proved to be four fine linen sheets and pillow-cases, marked "Rochefort." Beneath the

linen she found ladies' underclothing of fine cambric, two silk dresses, a box of beautiful lace, and in the box a German letter, a pile of children's embroidered frocks, three dolls and a pretty little doll's parasol, and last of all, a beautiful Sèvres china clock, ornamented with Cupids. Clearly these things were stolen from a French house, and destined to become the property of some German military doctor's wife.

Miss Pim had no scruples in opening the letter; doubtless it would explain where the things came from, and this is what she read: —

My sweet Lisa, my dear little wife, — I know how much your ever true heart is troubled. The terrible deprivations at home and your well-founded anxieties about me must wound your tender heart. I am sending you these nice things as consolation. The dresses look too narrow for my Lisa's lovely plumpness, but you will arrange them with your skilful needle. Our little Lisachen will look an angel in the frocks I send, and the lace in this box is, I believe, very valuable. We must hand it down in our family. Klein Wilhelm, when he grows up, must have it for his wife. The sheets are good, and will please you, I know. All these things come from the château of a real Countess. The Colonel took all the pictures and miniatures, but General Wissmann took the jewels. Such necklaces! Oh, my Lisa, it made my mouth water to see those diamonds. The Countess behaved shamefully; she insulted us all, and called us murderers and thieves; we did not mind the insults as individuals, but we resented them as good Germans who have the sacred mission of spreading Kultur and winning the love and trust of other peoples. The son of the

Countess, who is a French Captain, was at the château with his wife and children. He was a spy — he had come back disguised as a peasant. Of course, we were bound to protect ourselves against spies. All the males in the château, including the Count, were therefore justly executed; we did not like killing the women and children, but our General had to overcome his reluctance, and it was the truest compassion, for when the Countess and her daughter-in-law fell, what would have become of the children! It was painful to me to have to certify to the death of all the inmates of that château, but war is war, and every day it becomes more terrible for *us*. It is nothing but murder and butchery — where is the fair play the English talk so much about? They have ten times as many men and guns as we have. No one can stand their fire. We remove our guns as fast as we can, and retire according to plan. It makes my heart bleed to think of my Lisa and the children having such difficulties about food; but courage, dearest, the English, I hear, are starving, and their chief towns and ports have been destroyed by our noble airmen — born heroes. The All Highest says we shall soon have Peace with an indemnity which will make us all rich. Thine ever devoted husband.

LUDWIG GUNTHER.

Miss Pim wrote in German on a sheet of paper: —

The Countess spoke the truth. You Germans *are* murderers and thieves — indeed, your husband has acknowledged it: he says that after robbing them of all valuables the whole of this family was butchered — but you will be made to suffer for these crimes. NEMESIS!

She put this postscript with the letter into the envelope, replaced it in the box of lace, folded the vari-

ous articles, and returned them to the basket, which she fastened up again. The train was gathering speed, but the neglected railway and lack of wheel-grease made the journey very rough and unpleasant, added to which a sickening odour streamed over the truck whenever the train stopped. For some time Miss Pim was puzzled to account for it, but, scrambling on one of the cases to obtain a better view of the country, she noticed that the cover on one of the trucks had been blown back, revealing partly clothed, decomposing bodies tied together in bundles of three and four with wire and ropes. Miss Pim sank down on to the basket, covering her face with her hands. She had expected war to be horrible — but *this!* — such appalling horrors; the massacre of innocent women and babes; the savage ferocity of soldiers; the desecration of their dead; for Miss Pim realised that these trucks of corpses, treated like carrion, were destined for the Fat Factory.

"When these people are conquered," she thought, "these traits of character will nevertheless be latent; a German, defeated, will still and ever be a German, ruthless, merciless, cruel, crafty, false through and through. There will be Von Schlanges for all time, and although the snake's head be trodden in the mud, the reptile's body will continue to wriggle. England must never sleep again, without sentinels to watch.

Never again must she be caught unprepared. Treaties against war, if not backed by force, are all scraps of paper. Commercial treaties are the only ones which have any chance of being observed."

Miss Pim now bitterly regretted her undertaking; her whole being shrank from the ordeal. Not that she was concerned about her own safety, but she loathed propinquity with these people. Bruised in body and spirit she lay there, passing through Namur and Liège. She saw very few people about, but the fields were well cultivated; the German taskmasters took care of that. At Liège Belgians in gangs were being entrained in cattle trucks to be carried off into slavery. It was a fearful sight — worse, indeed, than seeing the poor dead bodies. That free men should be enslaved, and forced to work for the enemy, was a bondage so vile that Miss Pim wept and wept, at the shame of it.

CHAPTER XIV

At Aachen the train stopped, and Miss Pim, quite stiff, aching in every limb, reached the platform. She made her way to the buffet. It was evening — her first evening in Germany. She determined to appear as a *bonâ-fide* traveller, and to order and pay for her supper. For some time she sat in the restaurant at a table covered with white American cloth, and, finding no one came, she called to a German waitress and asked for some food. The woman with languid indifference demanded her bread, butter, and meat cards.

"But I am a traveller, just arrived from Belgium. I have no card."

"You might in that case be permitted Government soup, and some ersatz-kaffee" (coffee made from a substitute), "but most people coming into Germany *bring* food. You are not German, though, and your accent is not Dutch," said the woman suspiciously.

"No," replied Miss Pim; "I am Swiss. I am a governess. I went to Brussels to take my pupils into Holland. I am now rejoining the mother of my pupils in Berlin. We have been in Switzerland."

"Well, you would have done better to stay in Holland. There is great want here. It is not because of the *price* of food, but because food is unobtainable — we just get sufficient to keep life in our bodies, but not enough to work on. They do say we shall get some corn from the Roumanian harvest, but we poor people will not see much of that."

Miss Pim was now treated to a cup of broth made with hot water, oatmeal, and some kind of unsound fish.

"I really don't think I can swallow this," said Miss Pim, eyeing the mess with aversion.

"Yet it is good soup," said the woman, looking hungrily at the steaming cup.

"Then let me see you drink it. Oh, I will pay for it, of course," added Miss Pim. "There is no one here; sit down and drink it."

The woman, unable to resist, seated herself at the table and noisily gulped down the soup. "Oh, that was good," she exclaimed, wiping her mouth on her apron.

"But is there nothing you could give me?" asked Miss Pim rather anxiously.

The woman, now gratefully inclined, went off to search, returning with a cup of substitute coffee, without milk or sugar, a few stewed plums, and a very small piece of what she called gingerbread. Miss

Pim had to be satisfied with this, but she ate without appetite. The woman watched her with some amusement.

"Ah, you are dainty *now* because you come from a land of plenty; but wait a bit, — you will soon feel willing to gnaw your shoes."

Miss Pim asked her where to find the best hotel, and at what time the train left for Berlin.

"The trains just now are crowded with wounded, — yes, and with dead, too," said the woman, lowering her voice. "Oh, it is a fearful sight. Two, three years ago, these same trains brought English prisoners. But all that is changed; those terrible English are now taking our boys prisoners, and they have guns so powerful they will soon be able to hit Aachen from France."

Then, as travellers entered noisily, she made out the bill, saying: "The fast train to Cologne starts at nine o'clock in the morning. You should be here at half-past eight, and the Hotel of the Royal Eagle is five minutes' walk from the station, to your right."

Miss Pim knew that she could not enter the hotel without passport and police permits, so she resumed invisibility and softly left the station.

The Eagle Hotel was crowded with officers, and after diligent search not an unoccupied room could she find. Farther down the Bahnstrasse she found

another and smaller hotel, The Crown. Here also every room was taken. It was very difficult to see her way now, as the town was ill-lighted in the quieter quarters. Noticing a card in a window, signifying that bed and board could be had there, she determined to risk it and ask a lodging for the night.

A thin, severe woman opened the door. Miss Pim explained that she wanted to stay the night; that she had come from Holland, and was on her way to Berlin.

"Why do you not go to the hotel?" asked the woman, mistrusting the foreign accent.

"I tried both hotels," replied Miss Pim, "but they have not a spare room, so I walked on and found your house. My luggage is at the station."

"Have you been to the police?" asked the woman, still suspicious.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Pim, in despair; "but I have not got any bread or meat tickets."

"You have a traveller's card; that will do," said Frau Hoffmann.

"Not to-night," said Miss Pim; "the police will only give me my card to-morrow morning."

"There is another inn down this road," said the woman, stepping out and pointing vaguely in the darkness.

"But there are so many soldiers, and those hotels

are so noisy, they do not seem the right sort of place for a lonely woman. Please take me in; I pay well."

Somewhat mollified, Frau Hoffmann admitted Miss Pim.

"I can give you a sleeping-room, and to-morrow I can give you breakfast, but I cannot provide you with food to-night."

Miss Pim agreed to everything and never asked the price, which favourably impressed her hostess, who led her into a small room lighted, to Miss Pim's surprise, by an electric lamp. It was severely furnished: a solid chest of drawers, chair, and table, polished to such a degree that the light was reflected over and over again by every piece of furniture. The floor was painted and waxed and polished till it shone like a mirror. The bed was huge and billowy, the linen spotless — certainly cleanliness reigned here, almost, it seemed, to the exclusion of charm.

But peace and forgetfulness were all Miss Pim desired and these she found in the softest of feather beds. The dreadful *ersatz-kaffee* the next morning made her realise that the daily meals would be a difficulty, but she would have no scruples in helping herself now from the tables or shops of German people, especially of the well-to-do.

Frau Hoffmann sourly made out her bill and saw her lodger depart with evident relief. She had felt

all was not well. Miss Pim had not shown a police permit, and she had looked rather English, for all she professed to be Swiss — how was it her boots had the name of an English maker? Frau Hoffmann might have notified the police of her suspicions, but the police gave trouble. She herself might become suspect. Had she not trouble enough with Johann Hoffmann, her husband, at the front, and Albert, her son, in training? She would charge Miss Pim double to pay for the anxiety she had given her. Miss Pim paid with a kind smile and earnest thanks, whereupon hard-visaged Frau Hoffmann burst into tears, and between her sobs she said: —

"Take the name of the English maker off your boots, Fräulein. Sooner or later you will be caught, and you will certainly be shot. Never attempt to move without a police permit; if you do you will be handed over to the police. I risked taking you in last night, because — money is so very scarce, and the food, bad as it is, costs much. I gave you no food because, really, there is none in the house, but here is a hard-boiled egg, — I cannot send you on your journey starving. I keep five hens concealed in an attic and sometimes I am fortunate enough to get an egg or two."

Miss Pim saw that a refusal would hurt the poor woman, so she gratefully accepted it, with a neat

little packet of salt, and, hastening to the Aachen station, took a ticket to Cologne. A secret-service official was on the platform, but he was busy with passengers leaving Germany, and took no notice of passengers bound for Cologne. Possibly also Miss Pim's get-up, so eminently serviceable, had a rather German look, — the rucksack, the cloth hat with cocks' feathers, looking very like the Tyrolese hat, the stout laced boots,— all suggested "made in Germany."

So Miss Pim walked up and down the platform unmolested, amid a crowd of poor people and some soldiers. Two trains passed to Cologne, with blinds down and the Red Cross painted on the carriages, before the train she awaited was made up. Then she took her place in the second class, not without a struggle. Two Germans in succession tried to hustle her; one man nearly shoved her off the step as she was climbing in; another flung himself on to her lap and declared it was his place; but the conductor, finding the man had only a third-class ticket, was very wroth and pitched him out on the platform. The man in no way resented the violence of the official, but shook his fist at Miss Pim as the train moved out. Miss Pim could not help laughing, which so enraged the man that he jumped on to the step and spit at Miss Pim through the window, letting himself down as the train gathered speed.

"Very bad manners," observed a fellow traveller, "to spit at a German."

"Perhaps he guessed I was Swiss," said Miss Pim; "but it is bad manners to spit at any one."

"Excepting an English person," said the German, a stout professor, with a black mane brushed back, and wearing spectacles.

"I except no one," said Miss Pim stoutly. "It is degrading to the person who does it."

"Well, there *are* cases when it is the right thing to do. I am proud to say I spat at the ladies of the British Embassy at Berlin; I happened to be at the station," said the Professor, taking a copy of Kant out of his capacious pocket.

"Have you ever read this remark of Kant's?" said Miss Pim severely: "'I will not in my own person degrade the dignity of Humanity.'"

The Professor looked at Miss Pim with some surprise.

"Zo! You read our immortal Kant!"

"He is ours too," cried Miss Pim inadvertently, "for his mother was Scotch."

The Professor, with a malignant glow of pleasure and triumph, exclaimed: "Zo! You are a Scotch?"

"No," said Miss Pim; "my mother was Scotch. I am Swiss, from Berne."

"Then," said the Professor, "see, I spit on your

mother." And he expectorated violently on the foot-rug.

This infuriated a German woman with her two daughters. She yelled for the conductor, who bustled in, looking very severe. The three German ladies all spoke together and pointed to the floor of the carriage. The conductor glared at the Professor and pointed to the notice, "Verboten zu rauchen"—smoking is forbidden. In vain the Professor made assurances that he had not been smoking. He was dragged out of his seat and hauled off to a smoking-compartment. On the seat he left Kant, and a dark meerschaum pipe, which evidently had fallen out of his pocket. Miss Pim rose and hurried after him in the corridor, handing him the book and the pipe. The Professor was rather taken aback; then he smiled and exclaimed, "Forgive," and Miss Pim smiled back.

Later, when they met in the restaurant car, he became quite chatty and attentive, and naïvely talked a great deal about himself. He was so interested in his subject that he forgot to ask any awkward questions. Miss Pim learnt that there was to be a kind of Congress of Professors at Cologne, to discuss War Aims and Peace. Professor Schnupftuch gave Miss Pim his card, and begged her to attend the Congress, especially on the third day, when he was to speak.

"Are all the German Professors to talk on War Aims?" asked Miss Pim.

"Certainly," replied the Professor. "It is a boundless subject, and all shades of opinion will be represented. There will be Turks and — Bulgarians, as well as Hungarians and Austrians."

"The Turkish view ought to be interesting," said Miss Pim dryly.

"Certainly, it will be interesting; the Turks have very — progressive War Aims; their Kultur is exceedingly advanced. Really, Fräulein, you should attend, especially when I read *my* paper."

"What point of view do you take?"

"A moderate point of view. It is useless to make exorbitant demands, we must not utterly crush the European nations, as we need them for trading with, and therefore we must *insist* on friendly relations. I have a fine passage on the brotherly love of nations. The German, of course, having a higher morality, has a higher mission in the world; he must educate the world and teach nations the true spirit of humanity. It is very terrible to think how little the German nature is understood by other races. We feel no ill-will towards any people; once we have made peace, we shall cordially offer the hand of friendship to all; we shall trade with all. One of the conditions of our peace will be free markets, free seas, and freedom of all

routes for trade. We must, alas! insist on a large indemnity, because otherwise we shall be ruined and our victory will be equivalent to a defeat. Belgium and the North of France we must retain, and our colonies must be restored, with a portion of the enemies' colonies as compensation. After all, seeing how this war was forced on us, our programme is, I think, exceedingly moderate and magnanimous. We are undertaking a great task, that of enlightening foreign peoples; but we shall not flinch; the outcome of our labour will be the gradual uplifting of the whole human race."

Professor Schnupftuch's eyes glowed with fervour and he seemed to swell, as he noisily ate the excellent dinner set before him.

Miss Pim listened with interest mingled with astonishment. She could not feel angry, the Professor was *so* ridiculous; he was quite ignorant of facts and lived entirely in the realms of fantasy.

She made no comment, but looked dreamily out of the windows of the car. Then, feeling it incumbent to make some remark, she asked abruptly: "How is it that we can have such a good meal on the train when it is so difficult to get food elsewhere?"

"Ah, that is politics. Neutrals travel; they are well fed, so they report Germany is not starving, and the enemy trembles; for I have it on excellent authority the English are dying of hunger."

Miss Pim laughed so heartily that she attracted the attention of travellers, who glared at her; she blushed and repented. Suddenly a huge German, in a kind of knitted nightcap, came swaying towards her and stood balancing himself by extremely dirty hands spread on the table.

"Zo!" he exclaimed, "you laugh, and there is war going on — everywhere." He glared at her so furiously that Miss Pim felt convulsed by laughter. She buried her face in her paper serviette. The Professor, very angry, rose and glared at the other man.

"This lady is with me. Address your questions to me. Repeat your question."

The huge man looked vaguely round and returned to his seat, and the incident was closed; but Miss Pim understood that she was now living amidst a strange, savage people, who looked on every one, even neutrals, as possible enemies; it therefore behoved her to go warily.

CHAPTER XV

How long that journey appeared to Miss Pim! It was very hot in the compartment, as all the windows were closed, and in Germany it is really "*verboten*" to keep a window open in a railway carriage or a room. A German's objection to fresh air is deep-rooted. Though he airs his mattresses and pillows, — for you can see windows everywhere bulging with these, when the weather is fine, — yet you never see man or woman sitting by an open window.

It was quite late when the train entered the central station of Cologne. The Professor, who had taken Miss Pim under his protection, advised her to go to a modest little hotel off the Hochstrasse, where he usually put up. Miss Pim explained that all her luggage had gone on to Berlin, and unfortunately her passport was in her trunk. The Professor said this was terrible, as she must show her passport to the police before she could get a permit. "But," said the garrulous, vain little Professor, "I will accompany you to the police, and Herr Professor Schnupftuch ought to be able to satisfy the authorities, being myself so important a personage; so leave it all to me."

Miss Pim was quite ready to do that. Of course she could have avoided all police supervision by becoming invisible, but that state had its drawbacks, for she could then learn nothing by direct questions, and it became rather unnerving to be apparently non-existent for a long time.

The Herr Professor carried a large canvas valise, a rug, and an umbrella. Miss Pim begged to be allowed to take the rug; the Professor was not unwilling, and together they walked out of the station.

A few steps brought them to the wonderful Domhof, that almost too perfect specimen of Gothic architecture. Its grandeur made Miss Pim gasp. The tops of the great towers were in full moonlight; below they were in shadow, not so deep, however, as to obliterate the wonderful embroidery and lacework of stone.

"Ach — zo! You feel the beauty of German art; and to think of those English pigs, trying to destroy this miracle by bombs."

"But no aeroplanes have threatened Cologne, or the cathedral," said Miss Pim.

"Threatened, yes, but Cologne is guarded. Look! The ever-watchful taubes are circling round, even now."

And as he spoke, three aeroplanes wheeled above the great Dom.

"And yet you have almost destroyed Rheims Cathedral, a greater masterpiece than the Cologne Cathedral," said Miss Pim indignantly.

"There you are entirely mistaken; it is not to be compared with this glory; it belongs to a rude epoch. You say we have almost destroyed it; that is not so, it is intact, but had we reduced it to dust that would in no way be regrettable. When we have conquered France, we can build up a finer edifice. Ah! Fräulein, wait till you get to Berlin! There you will learn what German art can do. The Thiergarten, the monument to Victory in the Königsplatz, the colossal figures of Schlossbrücke, more majestic than your Swiss mountains!"

They were now in the Hochstrasse, and, turning to the right and, farther down, to the left, in a rather mean street, they came to the Schwann Hotel. The Professor then began to beam and to play the host.

"Here we are, gnädige Fräulein, in a very comfortable rest-house."

He led her into a small passage, to a bureau. "Herr Müller, delighted to find myself once more in the Schwann. My room, it is reserved — good! And may I ask, has my colleague, Herr Professor Dummkopf, yet arrived? Good, and Von Papphirn? Ah! he will come later — zo! And Frau Müller I hope is well."

All this was poured out with bows and smiles.

Then, remembering Miss Pim: "This lady will join our party, a very distinguished Swiss lady, important neutral; you will find a room for her?"

Herr Müller clasped his hands and shook his head. Alas! they were full up, quite full; this great Congress, of such momentous importance, had filled Cologne, — even great sums of money could not obtain a bed.

The Professor beamed, and with the naïve vanity of a child, looked first at Miss Pim, then at the proprietor, and said: "I speak on the third day."

"Then I am afraid I must try elsewhere," said Miss Pim, who felt tired and very weary of her companion.

"On no account. Herr Müller, you must make room; you really must accommodate this lady."

Herr Müller had done some rapid calculating, and decided, if the lady would be willing to pay the price of a first-class room for a very inferior room, — well, it could be arranged.

The Professor hastened to accept for Miss Pim, and added, "Now I must accompany Fräulein to the police. Being a Swiss lady, she must report herself."

And off they marched. The Professor wanted Miss Pim to take his arm, like good *kameraden*, but the word grated on Miss Pim's ears, and the propinquity she objected to. But he was a kind little man, willing to put himself out for her; so she thanked him, assured him that she was not tired, and since her be-

longings had been left at the Schwann, she had nothing to carry but herself.

The police office had a forbidding aspect, — a dirty waiting-room, crudely and intensely illuminated; two old officers at high desks were nodding over ledgers. They were told to sit on a bench and wait. The Professor was as submissive as a lamb, and Miss Pim, who at home would have been exceedingly indignant, had no choice in the matter.

After waiting more than half an hour a man in uniform, with only one arm and one eye, summoned them to the Chief's office, a cheerless office of the "Verboten," a place of rules, orders, system, and punishment. The Chief, a haggard man, bald, with long wisps of yellow-grey hair and a long, melancholy mustache, sat hunched up over some papers he was numbering. Miss Pim noted his remarkably long fingers, which were also quite remarkably dirty. The Professor, evidently rather nervous, spoke rapidly for Miss Pim, and explained the absence of passport.

The policeman straightened himself and looked severely at Miss Pim. "Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

Miss Pim repeated her story: she came from Berne, her name was Arnaud, she was going to Berlin, etc.

"Well, you cannot move without your passport. I'll telegraph to the station at Berlin for your lug-

gage, and you should, properly speaking, spend the night here in a cell, but you have an honourable citizen, a good German, to speak on your behalf; so you may go to the Schwann, but you must report yourself twice a day here till your passport arrives. Be here to-morrow morning at ten. Here is a permit for the night, properly stamped; one mark."

Miss Pim paid in silence. She felt rather sorry for the Professor, as she knew that she must disappear the next morning, and the police, in that case, would certainly make it unpleasant for Schnupftuch.

All the way back to the hotel, the Professor held forth on the expected supper, wondering what Frau Müller had in store for them. Beer, alas! had become very poor stuff, but the proprietor had a fine collection of old Rhine wines, strong and yet soft as milk and honey. The Professor smacked his lips as he counted on his fat fingers his favourite wines. "We shall have great connoisseurs dining with us. Dr. Papphirn is Professor of Theology at Berlin: his paper on a German peace should prove interesting. And Herr Professor Dummkopf, he is a great Biblical scholar and doctor of Oriental languages at Göttingen. You have been fortunate to meet such distinguished men as myself and colleagues."

When they reached the Schwann, there was much bustle and noise. All the travellers had arrived, very

hungry Germans. Miss Pim was rather taken aback when shown her room: it was nothing but a big cupboard in Frau Müller's bedroom. The door had a glass top held open by a cord.

"I am sorry that we have no better room," said the stout proprietress. "It is Gretchen's room, our maidservant, but as soon as Herr Müller has left in the morning, you can come in here to dress."

Miss Pim found her bags on the bed; there was no room for a table. "War is war," she sighed, and after smoothing her hair and washing her face and hands in what appeared a small dish of water on a chair, she descended to the *spiese-saal* or eating-room. It was easy to find; the round of cheers which welcomed the steaming soup-tureen, brought in by Herr Müller, was a sufficient guide. Professor Schnupftuch had reserved a seat for Miss Pim beside him. Her other neighbour was a strange-looking individual, with an immense head and deep, overhanging brows; his eyes had the melancholy restlessness of the chimpanzee; his mouth was large, the crooked mouth of the orator. He wore a frock coat considerably the worse for wear, a crumpled shirt-front with a frill, and a loose red tie; his age, anything between thirty-five and fifty. Schnupftuch introduced him as "My distinguished colleague, Herr Doktor Friedrich Keutsick, Journalist and Socialist Reformer."

When Miss Pim was seated, she looked along the table at the guests: German professors and merchants with their wives, — worthy people possibly, but quite distressingly plain. Nowhere in England would such a collection have been possible. The women seemed uglier than the men, but that may have been because of their clothing and the way their heads were attired. Miss Pim felt quite shocked to find herself in such company. "And these creatures," she thought, "are representatives of the intellect of Germany!"

They were all eating their soup with dreadful inhaling sounds. A plate was put before her, — some kind of hotch-potch of barley, carrots, and again that doubtful fish she had smelt at the Aachen station buffet. Miss Pim hesitated; she feared ptomaine poisoning. She was hungry, and therefore tried and re-tried to swallow it, but all in vain. Dr. Keutsick observed her with a grin.

"Oh, you'll come to it by and by, if you remain in Germany."

Then, dexterously changing plates with her, he made short work of the mess, saying, "It is a pity to waste eatable food, because, I assure you, we get plenty which is quite uneatable."

"And what are you doing in our country?" he asked, his yellow monkey eyes darting furtive glances

first at her and then at the others. "Come to spy out the poverty of the land!" Miss Pim coloured up. "No, don't blush; see all you can and publish it over the world. You cannot say anything as bad as I *want* to say; but my paper has long been suppressed. I called it the 'Probe.' I am here to raise my voice at the Congress, but I shall be howled down. Silly dupes and wicked knaves, there you have the whole German nation ticketed."

Miss Pim looked the embarrassment she felt. The monkey-faced man seemed amused, he was now quite happy and confidential.

"How completely we have dished ourselves. This war was to make us masters of the world; we have dreamt of war, planned war, glorified war, preached war, then *made* war, and — Poof! the toadstool has burst. But it is only through ruin Germany will recover her senses, — is it not so? And it is through war you English will find your senses. Eh? You agree? Himmel! What fools you were before August, 1914!"

Miss Pim edged away from this extraordinary German.

"You do not like my saying you are English; as though you could hide it! These people see nothing, of course; they are intent on food, and the preparation of speeches and addresses. Huh! Huh! Of course you are English; you are not young, you are not

handsome, but you are sane and courageous, and — and clean; and we are none of these things just now. I don't ask you to commit yourself, 'give yourself away,' as the English call it. Oh, you English! I could like you if I were not so d——d envious of you. You will be taken up. All Germans are not so stupid as the Professors. You will certainly be taken up, and they will shoot you with — enjoyment. We like shooting women and children; it is our speciality; and at the same time we talk of our love of Humanity, our tenderness and chivalry. Huh! Huh!"

Miss Pim asked him why he was not fighting.

"Because, through infantile paralysis, I have one leg much shorter and weaker than the other. One leg would carry me to the front, the other would run away. I would call, 'Kamerad,' and mean it. I like the English, the quality of their stupidity is pleasing to me. What an article I could write on the different brands of stupidity of different nations! No; I am not yet up to the mark as a fighter, but I dare say, when we have got through our supply of little boys, we shall call up the halt and the blind. No; you are not going to refuse *blutwurst*; these sausages are a speciality here, and quite delicatessen."

So Miss Pim reluctantly tackled a black sausage and found it "possible." Professor Schnupftuch now plied her with pale golden wine, and tried to draw her

into an argument with the other Professors, but they were so venomous about England that she could not speak. The Professors' wives also were silent; it is doubtful whether they were listening to their liege lords; they were probably considering the quality and cost of the food. Their countenances were somewhat expressionless. Though they wore a settled look of anxiety, — for the problem of living was becoming harder, day by day, — Miss Pim noticed less submission than she had expected. When Professor Dummkopf was "strafing" England most vehemently, and boasting of German victories, Frau Professor Dummkopf violently shook her broad shoulders and exclaimed: —

"Ach! I am sick to death of such talk — what we want is Peace, any Peace — a French Peace, an English Peace; anything is better than this War!"

"My little sweet one," said the Professor, "you do not understand. This war was an obligation, a natural perspiration of the Great German Nation, whereby we throw off the fever, we become healthy, we march against all the nations of the world; they must become German or be killed; we will Germanize the world."

Frau Dummkopf again shrugged her ample shoulders and attacked a big stew — those mysterious soups and stews fairly sickened Miss Pim, and it was not a

pretty sight watching the Intellectuals gorging. Miss Pim recalled descriptions of Dahomeyans starving for a week in order the better to enjoy a banquet of roasted ox; she wondered whether these people had actually refrained from food, knowing they would eat amply at Cologne. Suddenly the proprietor approached Professor Schnupftuch and whispered something in his ear. Miss Pim thought it must be a police denunciation, but her neighbour's beaming countenance reassured her. The Professor half rose from his chair, and looked at all the ugly, careworn faces with a benevolent smile.

"Ah!" breathed Miss Pim, momentarily closing her eyes, "he is going to announce a German victory!"

"No, no," said Dr. Keutsick; "victories are announced daily, and no one believes in them. Our friend has something far more important than a German victory to tell us about."

Old Schnupftuch's face was a study: the look of radiance, the half-closed eyes, the tongue passed to and fro over his thick lips.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Herr Müller has just told me that he is going to bring in — a — roast goose!"

The roars of the applause were deafening. "Hoch! Hoch!" was repeated — all along the table.

"Fill your glasses!" shouted Schnupftuch. Every one stood. "Now, drink to the Goose!" And each

guest clinked glasses with his neighbour, some shouting: "The Goose!" others, "The Kaiser!"

When the proprietor entered holding high the dish containing the goose, one good lady, in a plaid merino dress with short puffed sleeves, burst into tears.

Miss Pim asked Dr. Keutsick in a low voice, "Are they starving?"

"Underfed, no doubt, but the good woman has had too much Rhine wine. It is very heady, for all its apparent mildness."

Miss Pim felt really shocked.

> "You might have been a Rooshun,
> Or you might have been a Prooshun,
> But, you chose to be an Englishwoman,"—

said her monkey-faced neighbour.

"Yes, thank God!" sighed Miss Pim.

"Ah, — an avowal at last!" said the Socialist, with a twist of the face, intended for a smile. Again Miss Pim blushed. What a poor conspirator she made!

CHAPTER XVI

Cologne, of course, was a military centre, but Miss Pim felt nothing was to be gained by lingering there. Berlin was the central ganglion, where the Ministers and the Ministries could be visited and valuable information could be gathered. Of course, the Head of the War Office, Hindenburg, and his brain and voice, Ludendorff, would be away, but Berlin was the real Headquarters. The Minister of the Navy, the Chancellor, the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, some one of these was sure to be at Berlin.

After sleep of an inferior quality in the cupboard bedroom, Miss Pim rose unrefreshed. She dreaded meeting the Professor, because she had come down fully equipped for her journey to Berlin, and Herr Müller, at her request, was making out the bill. She had her coffee, — that unsatisfactory substitute coffee, — and nothing else. The Schwann provided no bread or butter for those without cards, and it was only as a friend of the Professor's that she had been allowed meat at the dinner. Miss Pim was sitting rather disconsolate, when Dr. Keutsick hobbled in and sat beside her.

"So, you are off, tired of us, — is it not so? What,

have you nothing for breakfast, but that beastly coffee! Here, Frau Müller, quick, a decent breakfast for this lady! — cocoa, of your best, and I saw a jug of milk going into your bureau. Come, the All Highest, you know, wishes neutrals to carry away a good impression of the Vaterland."

"Oh! Herr Doktor! Food is scarce in Cologne," whined the woman.

"But not at the Schwann," retorted Keutsick, "where the best food, the best cooking, and the best hotel proprietress in all Germany is to be found."

Frau Müller smiled, and soon Miss Pim had excellent cocoa, a small hot cake of bread, some sardines, and marmalade.

"That's better," said monkey-face, grinning. "Now, you will write a more favourable report on Cologne."

"You are very kind, Herr Doktor," replied Miss Pim, "and I confess I am grateful. It is dreadful how my mind seems to run on food here in Germany."

"Which proves you are human — Angli, non Angeli. And where are you off to, if I may ask?"

"I am taking the 9.40 to Berlin. Will you explain to Professor Schnupftuch that I simply had to go, that I am sorry I cannot attend the Congress?"

"Oh, yes, I will tell him, and add that you are specially grieved not to hear his wonderful paper,

which is likely to alter the whole situation in Europe and America, but that you are called to Potsdam by the All Highest. If you start early for the Central Station and are willing to walk slowly, I will accompany you there. Every one will say, 'What a lucky woman to have such a handsome companion!'"

"I shall be truly grateful," said Miss Pim, well knowing the help it would be to have a German chaperon.

So with salutations to Mine Host and his Frau, Miss Pim walked slowly down the Hochstrasse with her strange companion.

"Where shall you stay, in Berlin?" he asked.

"I hardly know. I shall try the Adlon."

"You will be in danger all the time you are in Berlin — you realise that?"

Yes; Miss Pim acknowledged it.

"And yet you go ahead — dear me, what a people! What an enemy! But see here, there is a place where you may get a shelter and a bed, if you find yourself in danger. Merckelstrasse, a poor street close to the Spree — the address is on this piece of paper, and the password. Can you read it now and here, so as to return me the paper? This is a secret emergency refuge for Socialists — Liebknecht often went there, and many others, the genuine article, not make-believes like Schiedemann."

In the shadow of the great Dom Kirche Miss Pim read and re-read the address and the password: "*The Flaming Dawn is breaking.*"

"That is a poem written by a young Socialist, a Jew boy, who was shot dead in Berlin. Shall I repeat it to you?" And with waving, quivering hands Keutsick chanted in a vibrating voice: —

"The flaming Dawn is breaking,
How many died to see
The glorious Sun of Freedom,
Arise to make us free!

"How many died to save us!
And if we would not fail,
We too must die for Liberty,
That Freedom may prevail.

"No tender love of woman,
No happiness of home,
No joy of little children, —
Go forward all alone.

"Go forward in the darkness
Until the rising sun
Dispels the night of Tyranny,
And Liberty is won."

"Can you understand that?" said the uncouth young man.

"Yes, I understand the words and the sentiment," replied Miss Pim. "My only doubt is whether you are sufficiently numerous to win your freedom. The

Government here does n't hesitate to shoot and imprison. You say the poet himself was shot dead — presumably in some rising. It seems to me the German people are too stolid and too timid; you are not a fearless people — indeed, I think Germans are highly 'nervy,' as we call it."

Keutsick was silent; he looked profoundly gloomy. In silence they reached the station. Miss Pim felt sorry for him.

"Dr. Keutsick, I think the dawn *will* come for Germany — it is very dark now, but Germany is not going to continue in darkness. After this war men like you will perhaps be able to rouse the masses — even if you die in the attempt you will have helped Germany to win her deliverance."

"Thank you," he said quite simply; "I believe what you say. I hate to think that Germans will shoot you in a prison-yard."

"I knew the risk I ran when I came," replied Miss Pim, "but it is less than you suppose."

"Oh, you don't know Germans! We are thorough — once in their net, no fish escapes. Ah, well, you are a brave woman. If you get back to your country, write to me, after the war. Now, here is your train — a dreadfully overcrowded train. I will bribe the conductor."

He hobbled off, and, perspiring freely from the

unwonted exertion, hastened back mopping his big head and thick throat.

"Another carriage will be put on. See, here it advances. Conductor, see that this lady has every attention, she is an important neutral, a friend of Dr. Michaelis and Grand Admiral von Tirpitz."

The guard bowed low to Miss Pim. She climbed into the dirty, unswept carriage, and waved her hand to the monkey-faced Socialist as the train creaked and rattled out of the station.

Miss Pim knew that the journey to Berlin would be long and tedious, but she had not bargained for nearly eighteen hours' travelling. At first she was interested to see the great coal country, where all the biggest steel and iron works of Germany are crowded, working day and night. As the train approached, she even felt tempted to visit that formidable city, to see Krupp's works in full blast; she could see the chimneys and roofs from the railway, and noted the protection of steel netting over roofs. The train soon passed on to Dortmund, where there was a few minutes' wait for lunch, but Miss Pim thought it wiser to nibble at her emergency rations and not to leave her seat. The journey now became very wearisome. The arrival at Hanover did not interest her in the least. Afterwards, at small stations, she saw platoons of prisoners, some English, others French; but

the majority were Russian. The English still held their heads high. A German in the train observed: "One would think, to look at these English pig-dogs, that *they* were the conquerors, and that we were less than the dust. Did you ever see such arrogance? Now look at those Russians; how different they are! — simple-hearted peasants, grateful for small kindnesses, ready to smile; but these Englishmen think they own the world! Look at that unemotional self-control. Come, Adolf, let us spit at them as they pass; let us show them we are men, not animals." And the two big, shabby Germans rose; one went to the door, the other to a window, which he let down, and they tried to spit far enough to reach the British prisoners, who quietly drew out of reach and continued a low-voiced conversation together, never once glancing at the train. Miss Pim noted their haggard, unshaven faces, their extreme emaciation, and she could not repress her tears; leaning back, she covered her face with her handkerchief as though she slept, and it was some time before her tears dried behind that cambric veil.

CHAPTER XVII

After hours and hours of dreary flat country, darkness closed down, and Miss Pim was dozing when she suddenly awakened to find it was Berlin, at last! Slowly the train steamed into the great station, even at that late hour thronged with people, because trains now were very few and far between; people therefore waited in crowds, submissive as cattle. All the railway officials and porters, Miss Pim noticed, were women, disguised as men.

It now seemed advisable to become invisible. There were many spies stalking about the station, — those ridiculous Prussian spies recognisable as such all over Berlin.

Miss Pim was glad to be free. It seemed delightful to move about and to go where she pleased. She crossed the Spree, a slow-flowing, dull stream, spanned by ugly bridges, and soon found herself in wide, ill-lighted streets of extremely lofty houses. The Wilhelm-strasse appeared to her miles long. though it spread out at intervals into *Plätze* and *Gartens*, with the great Brandenburg Gate opening from the Thiergarten into the famous Allee unter den Linden. Berlin was undoubtedly a city of fine buildings and multitudinous statues; it all seemed

very big and mysterious in the moonlight, and even at that hour gave an impression of wealth and prosperity. The monumental piles of palaces and official residences, the magnificent cafés and restaurants, although these were closed, all contributed to give that solid effect of riches, of bigness, as though the very bulk of the buildings were an asset.

It was only later, in the sunshine, that she saw the real Berlin, the people walking listlessly in mourning, anxious and downcast. In the shops sham foods were exhibited: barrels of butter, tinted to the life, sham margarine, sausages of painted wood, and eggs of polished chalk. Many women of the middle class went in sandals, and others wore boots with wooden soles. Miss Pim was struck by the melancholy and pallor of the faces. Many women carried nets which held half a cabbage or one turnip or a piece of smoked fish. They were all prowling about with the same obsession, — the hunt for food, something cheap, satisfying, and palatable. The contrast was striking — these palatial buildings, all bearing the aspect of immense wealth, and these miserable inhabitants. The streets were very quiet, owing to the absence of traffic. Trams were running, but at long intervals. Motors had disappeared with the exception of military motors and motor-ambulances, but these latter took side streets and usually passed at dusk.

Miss Pim felt sure that she would find accommodation in one of the big hotels. The Adlon looked grand and quiet; bed and board here must be the best obtainable, so Miss Pim entered and, finding a lift about to ascend, made her way to the fourth floor; treading richly carpeted corridors, she tried, in vain, to enter the rooms; every place was locked. In a service room she found a German girl telling her fortune with a greasy old pack of cards; on the table beside her was the master-key of the rooms. Possessed of the key, Miss Pim walked the length of the corridor, turned sharp to the left down another long corridor, and opened at hazard — No. 95. It was occupied. In every room she visited she found luggage — or people. On the fourth floor there was not a free room. It then occurred to Miss Pim that probably the more expensive rooms on the first and second floors would be untenanted, so she descended, and entered, on the first floor, a princely suite — bedroom, bathroom, salon, hung with silk, a *nouvelle art* bed of mahogany and brass, — quite a Junker apartment. Miss Pim locked her two bags in a magnificent Buhl chest of drawers, and decided to indulge in the luxury of a hot bath. A luxury it was, indeed, taking away the sensation of depression and fatigue. Then she lay on a silken couch, meditating on her next move. So far, she had done nothing of any value to England.

She must lose no time on the morrow "to make good." Perhaps a visit to the Palace of the General Staff in the Thiergarten would be productive; at any rate, she might hear where Von Hindenburg was to be found. Next, she would visit the different Ministries, and see the Chancellor, etc.

Early the next day she wandered out into the fine Linden Avenue, past the Crown Prince's palace, the opera house, the Kaiser's palace, and innumerable fine buildings, palatial if not palaces, through the Brandenburg Gate to the Königsplatz. Here she ventured to ask a woman whether the Kaiser was in Berlin; the woman shook her head. "He is seldom here now," she replied.

Miss Pim continued: "I am a Swiss, on a visit here for the first time. Berlin is a fine city."

"Oh, yes, it is a fine city, but you are here at a terrible time. Do the Swiss people think the peace will soon come? They say those wicked English people are preventing peace, the peace our Emperor offers."

"I cannot say when peace will come," replied Miss Pim, "but I have heard that the Allies talk of dictating the terms of peace. In Switzerland it is known that the Germans started this war."

"Which shows how the enemy lies," replied the woman. "I hope our new Chancellor and our submarines will soon bring them to reason."

"Is Von Hindenburg in Berlin?" asked Miss Pim.

"That I cannot tell you. Some say he has gone East, others that he has gone West; he is not nearly as popular as he was."

"What is that big building over there? It looks like a museum."

"No; it is the palace of the General Staff. The War Office and the Admiralty are away back by the Potsdam Gate, quite near what was the British Embassy. To think of our allowing those horrible people to reside within a stone's throw of our War Office!"

"Thank you; it is very kind of you directing me. To-morrow I must visit your museums. Tell me, where have I the best chance of getting a good dinner?"

The woman was doubtful. "They say there are secret places where rich people can dine well. If that is true it is a wicked shame, for we are all suffering most terribly. I go to the public kitchens with my cards, but the very poor cannot afford the fifty pfennigs. If you visited the underground people you would soon realise what Berliners are suffering."

"Who are the underground people?"

"Why, the thousands of poor folk who live in cellars, without means of heating. It comes to this — the poor of Berlin are without fires, food, or light."

"Why don't the people rise up against the Kaiser?"

"Why? The All Highest grieves for us, but what can he do? He must defend his country. It is the English we must punish; from all accounts their punishment is already severe. They are starving — that is our one joy. There is a good restaurant in Markgrafen-strasse, — Von Burgen's, — but, of course, I cannot tell you anything about the food; restaurants are not for such as I."

Miss Pim thanked the woman and retraced her steps along the Linden, then turning down Charlotten-strasse, entered the street where she was to find the excellent restaurant. She knew that it was hopeless to ask for a meal without the various tickets, so, slipping off her visibility, she passed into Von Burgen's Restaurant, and, choosing a small table in a recess, she went to the dishing-room at the back. In war-time dinners were served early, and already there were habitués, with serviettes tied round their necks, clamouring for soup. Miss Pim secured a plateful, which she carried off to her table with a piece of war bread. In this way she helped herself to a sufficient meal, without interference. It was dull sitting there alone, but the morrow should prove interesting, and this short respite was not altogether unwelcome, as it enabled her to make her plan of campaign.

After a long rest in her sumptuous suite at the Adlon, she returned at seven o'clock to dine at Von Burgen's, and then decided to visit a kinema. There were many, so she chose the one where the crowded entrance testified to the popularity of the show, a typical German crowd, where the man elbowed his way rudely, trod upon women's feet without apology, and even pushed them aside with violence.

Miss Pim paid for a good place and found herself in a glittering hall all white-and-gold paint and brilliantly illumined by electric lights. At a piano was an old lady, an old man fiddled, and a child played on a cello.

A nervous, shabby little German lent Miss Pim his programme.

"I love to see the English prisoners on the film," he said excitedly. "I have been to this show three times already; it revives my flagging hopes. You will see the submarining of a proud English ship. Such pictures, being facts, are better than all the newspapers, for, to tell you the truth," he added, looking round timidly, "I am beginning to doubt some of the victories our papers speak of. Oh, not *all*, of course, but some of them do not seem convincing. Here, however, we see the actual occurrence."

Miss Pim glanced at the programme. Decidedly she was to see the humiliation of the British that evening.

"Is the Kaiser in Berlin?" she enquired.

"No; he is at Potsdam, resting, for he has been making speeches of encouragement to his troops on every front, and they say he is quite exhausted. Hindenburg sent him because our men showed signs of discouragement. Can it be wondered at? But we must not believe all the dreadful things we hear. That is why I come to this show; it revives my depressed spirits, — and does not cost much," he added with a sigh.

"Do you expect an early peace?" enquired Miss Pim.

"Why, certainly. There is a Congress now going on at Cologne to consider the terms we shall impose. The All Highest is also arranging a Congress at Stockholm, not, of course, in his own name, but he settled it all in Russia. He considered it wiser to have it appear democratic. It is like a big lump of cheese in a mouse-trap, that democratic talk." And the little German gave a mirthless cackle, as he took off his spectacles and wiped them.

"You see," he continued, "at the beginning of this war, undoubtedly, we were wanting in diplomacy, we were frank and brusque. Now we have learnt our lesson and we are all things to all men. Our Kaiser on occasions encourages democratic talk, and Herr Scheidemann is patted on the back. We speak of fraternal love to the Russians — but they are nasty

brutes and we don't love them at all, any more than the Serbians, for whom we have absolute detestation, but diplomacy demands many sacrifices. Pardon me, Fräulein, you are not German?"

"No, I am Swiss. I am here for a short visit. I wanted to see the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, the Chancellor, Grand-Admiral von Tirpitz, all the great people one reads about."

The little German cackled again. "Well! you could see the Chancellor; he is going to the Admiralty at eleven o'clock and returns to the Chancellery half an hour later, where there is to be a council; probably Von Tirpitz will be there and many important personages. Michaelis is considered rather reactionary, but he is an able man, undoubtedly an able man. If you stand outside the Chancellery, you will catch sight of him."

The kinema pictures were well done. Scene after scene was depicted exhibiting the tenderness, the generosity, the chivalry of the German, followed by magnificent instances of their valour: three Germans standing against fifty Englishmen, all dancing round the Germans with bayonets fixed, unable, for some reason or other, to hurt the Germans. The last scene fairly roused the house — the three Germans kill twenty Englishmen and the remaining thirty surrender, crying, "Have pity, comrades."

It was a mistake, in a succeeding film, to show some of the men who had been Englishmen before, this time very unmistakable Germans. Miss Pim drew the attention of her neighbour to that fact.

"See, that stout man with a scar along his cheek. Well, just now he was an English prisoner. These pictures are all made up." But Miss Pim found that there are none so blind as those who will *not* see.

"Madame, you are mistaken, that German has a fine countenance, he could not look like a pig-dog. But wait, you will soon see thousands of British prisoners crossing a bridge, with German officers in charge."

Miss Pim's heart sank when she saw, only too clearly, a long line of our brave boys advancing across a bridge, accompanied by masses of German soldiers armed to the teeth. As the film unrolled the public became uncontrollably excited. They cheered, they yelled, some stood up on the benches waving their hats. The music played in time with the tramp of feet, and then it dawned on Miss Pim that these British prisoners were being marched and re-marched in endless procession across that bridge, — the same men, though of course, in different attitudes, — and she realised that these exhausted wounded men were being thus maltreated and humiliated that the German public might imagine they represented thousands.

"Shall we have to feed all those prisoners?" asked a little girl of her mother, a hard-visaged frau who sat next to Miss Pim.

"Oh, no, or so little it does n't count; if their countrymen like to feed them, well and good; we are indifferent; if they die of hunger it's their look-out."

"I suppose they are very bad, really, those English? But they have nice faces," said the child.

"Oh, hush, you bad girl! Never let me hear you say such a thing," said her mother angrily.

The little girl was silent for a while; then she began questioning again. "Little mother, tell me, do those wicked English ever take our soldiers prisoners?"

"Sometimes, not often; yes, sometimes our brave men are taken prisoners by the English."

"And do they starve our men?" asked the child.

"No; I have not heard that they starve them. Your uncle Heinrich is a prisoner in England. He asked us not to send food; he says he is well fed."

"But — ought we, then, to starve their men?"

"Oh, Dora, you tease me with such foolish questions. Don't you see the difference between your own people and pig-dogs? Those poor prisoners in England are good Germans, who fought in self-defence, fought to keep a home for little Dora. The English are wicked people who made war on us from hatred

and jealousy, so do not let me hear you pity them, or you shall never again come to the kinema."

Dora was silent and possibly convinced, but she continued to look at the procession of English prisoners with some tenderness.

Miss Pim returned to the Adlon sick at heart. The horror of living amid these people, false to the core, cruel or cringing, coarse and common, was indeed a revolting experience. She must hasten to do what she had undertaken, and then return as quickly as possible to England, to Home, to the Land of the Brave and the Free.

As she lay down in the wonderful bed in that sumptuous room at the Adlon, she thought with pride and love of the Allies, all united, not by violence, not by cupidity, not even by a scrap of paper, but fast bound by one ideal, one word, the password of all these peoples — "Freedom."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next morning Miss Pim was at the Chancellery before the Ministers, and awaited their arrival in the entrance hall. She joined a group of young naval officers, cheerful, irresponsible young fellows, who, although they cultivated the ruthless look, had not quite attained it. Dr. Michaelis, the Chancellor, entered with a small group of ministers. Miss Pim recognised him from portraits she had seen. A pale, dark man, with the look of a ferocious old woman. Von Tirpitz was easily recognisable, though his whiskers were less flowing than we depict them in caricatures. The young naval officers drew back, but Michaelis beckoned to one of them, desiring his presence at the conference. Quietly, unseen and unsuspected, Miss Pim mounted the great staircase, entering the Council Chamber with the evil-looking Councillors. Michaelis seated himself at the head of a long table, the others taking seats on either side of the table, according to rank and office. Miss Pim took a chair not far from the young naval officer, and, leaning her arms on the table, bent forward and listened intently. Michaelis, looking round venomously, began, in a rasping voice, to read over the

minutes of the last meeting. Then he flung down the paper, and began: —

"Gentlemen, whatever we hide from the public, we cannot hide from ourselves the extreme seriousness of the situation." Tirpitz growled something. "My colleague spoke?" enquired Michaelis, looking daggers. Tirpitz growled, "Continue." "I do not hold myself responsible," said Michaelis, "for the mistakes of my predecessors; all I can do is to defend, to the best of my ability, the Fatherland. General von Rosenwald is here to represent the Army, as General von Hindenburg is away. Well, gentlemen, Army and Navy and State agree that we must intensify the terrorizing of the enemy, north, south, east, and west, by land and sea and air; we must be *more* ruthless, *more* terrible. The All Highest has said that International Law no longer exists, but we go further. I declare to you most solemnly that Moral Law no longer exists. There shall *not* be any more Moral Law. Our annihilation is threatened by the enemy. Shall we, then, be trammelled by considerations of morality?"

Michaelis glared through his spectacles at the assembled Councillors. Only the young naval man blushed, and looked uneasy.

"Shall the enemy be exempt from suffering? A thousand times No! We must increase his sufferings.

We must put no restraint on ourselves, but be ruthless — absolutely ruthless!"

"Ach! my dear Michaelis, what more would you have?" said the General, twirling his mustache. "We have done our best."

"I have summoned you here," continued the Chancellor, "to inform you that it is the wish of the All Highest that you *do more*. Professor von Schamm has completed a new bomb, capable of spreading disease; the difficulty hitherto has been that the heat generated by the high velocity sterilized the germs; that difficulty has been overcome. Then in the future all wells falling into the enemy's hands must be highly poisoned."

"We *did* poison them, near Bapaume, and fifty of our own men died in agonies," said the General savagely.

"Well, that was gross carelessness on the part of the commanding officers; it is not suggested that our own men be poisoned. Are we going to be squeamish in the fourth year of the war? The needs of National Defence must alone decide what it is expedient to do.

"We must draw up orders to be sent to the Governor of Belgium, directing that every able-bodied man and woman is to be sent to Germany, the broken ones we shovel back, to manure the soil. It may be

objected, 'What about the Belgian infants and children?' Well, gentlemen, I take it that none of you are particularly anxious to protect that accursed breed. Let them die; we have no use for them. The Belgian girls and young women must be sorted out, and served out to good Germans; then they can return to Belgium and we shall have a proper Germanic race.

"The same must be done in conquered French Territory. Shall such people be spared the horrors of war? A very wholesome decision has been made that any civilians shot as warning to the community shall not be buried, the corpse lying there as a useful reminder of the fate awaiting traitors.

"All these things can be done in Belgium, France, and Poland, without any danger to ourselves. You understand, gentlemen, that I should be loath to expose good Germans to *danger*, but these measures can be taken without risk, as the people are in our power, utterly helpless; no reprisals therefore are to be feared.

"Not so with those accursed British, though we can do a great deal to the British prisoners. I have ordered that they have even less food and less exercise. What we want, however, is to bring war home to the English. Zeppelins, alas! have not been successful; those vile brutes of British actually attack our beau-

tiful airships and bring them down in flames amid cheers, as though it were sport!

"But we must send more aeroplanes with still more terrible bombs, in order to awaken terror in the British. Oh! thrice blessed would be the German who could terrify those people! We had hoped to put them to the sword, to Germanize them; that, alas! seems an impossible dream. Still, we cannot, we must not give up killing English people; every dead woman and child in England is a gain to Germany. This is not inhumanity, it is a necessary military principle. We must recognise the fact that every day our soldiers are being mown down by British and French guns, and that we are *not* getting our share of British and French killed and wounded. This is serious. We must make up the number by attacking English towns and sinking English ships — the smallest fishing-boat, carrying Englishmen, must be sunk, without trace, and no lives saved."

The naval officer near Miss Pim leant forward, and in a deep voice, said, "The British save our men."

"They can afford to do so," retorted Michaelis savagely. "Our men are being killed in France by thousands; the English can afford to appear magnanimous; a nation of hypocrites like the English would not fail to assume virtuous airs; they think it pays — it does pay. I repeat, they can afford to save a few

German sailors. We cannot afford to do so, and it is for this reason I have asked you to meet me to-day. We must make up by frightfulness for our stupendous losses; once we succeed in terrifying the British, the end is in sight. Peace efforts, of course, must continue. We have some good friends in England, even in the British House of Commons, brave men who have dared to call us friends — in public. Truly they shall be rewarded after the war. The All Highest is designing a special medal for them. We are not ungrateful. Then there are newspapers in England zealously working for us; they, too, will find favour with the All Highest."

"Skunks," muttered the naval officer.

"Captain Langbrecht seems to disapprove! I think it is a positive misfortune he was educated in England; he seems to have lost much of his German virility; he is over-nice in his ideas of war."

Von Tirpitz looked at him and laughed. "Oh, Langbrecht is all right. Give him a hundred submarines, and he will give a good account of himself. He is a fighter."

Michaelis looked sourly at Von Tirpitz. "I don't expect to hear that *you* are opposed to ruthlessness!"

"Oh, dear, no. England would have been starving by now if my advice had been taken in time, but

Chancellors have a way of interfering. *Now* it is too late; America has come in, and all the odds are against us, and you know it, Michaelis." And Tirpitz pulled his whiskers and grinned.

"I recognise the difficulty, but not the impossibility," continued Michaelis. "We must increase the output of submarines. Langbrecht has brought us the design of a very improved submarine, a very wonderful submarine."

"Is it not dangerous to carry it like that in the pocket?" said one of the Ministers.

"I do not carry it in my pocket," said Langbrecht, smiling, as he unfastened his tunic and groped inside his vest for a flat case made of oiled silk. From this he took a plan drawn on linen, which he handed up to the Chancellor. Michaelis put his hand down on it, and for the first time a lurid kind of smile played about his lips.

"You have something else there, Langbrecht."

The young man hesitated, and thrust back the case in his vest.

"You have another paper in that case, which I insist on seeing."

Langbrecht looked round, and said in a low voice, "I have only a private paper here."

"That paper," repeated Michaelis; "I insist on having that *private* paper."

Langbrecht shrugged his shoulders and let the slip go.

Michaelis glanced at it. "What have we here? A long list of places. Dear me, this seems interesting."

"It is a list of places where I refill my submarines with oil. The first column is a list of dépôts on the coast of Ireland; some are caches, some are dépôts, provisioned by *friends* there. The next list is for dépôts in Spain — then Greece, though many there have gone, no doubt. It is a very important list to me, sir. I should be glad if you would return it to me; I am uneasy without it."

Michaelis looked banteringly at him. "Captain Langbrecht has no reason to mistrust any one here, has he?" This was said with a sneer.

Miss Pim rose noiselessly and stole behind Michaelis's chair. The submarine plan lay before him, and he held the list between his finger and thumb.

Langbrecht looked down at the little silken case in his hand.

"The submarine design you ordered me to bring here to-day, but that list of submarine oil dépôts is my own private property," he said.

"Nothing useful to the State belongs to the individual. Other submarine commanders should have copies. How else can we hope to destroy England?"

asked Michaelis, and, dropping the list on to the plan, he folded his arms and glared at Langbrecht.

In one breathless instant Miss Pim leant forward and snatched up both the submarine design and the list of submarine bases.

"I have called you here, gentlemen," continued Michaelis, "because without doubt the situation is very grave. I will not ask you to take my word alone. Major von der Hagen will, I think, open your eyes to the terrible military situation. Admiral von Koester hoped to be here, but he is detained at Kiel. Dr. Solf has, however, heard from him, and he will tell you how hopeless it is for our battleships to attempt engaging the enemy. Dr. Zahn will tell you the views of the Foreign Office. I am right, Doctor, in saying that a separate Russian peace is hopeless?"

Dr. Zahn nodded.

"All our emissaries are discouraged. What remains, gentlemen? Frightfulness — and submarines. We must at once build these new submarines which will give us an immense advantage over our enemies; these plans —" Michaelis looked down: the plan had disappeared, and the list. He turned a dusky red. "Tell Captain Langbrecht to return those papers — at once."

The Captain stood up. "Sir, I passed them to you, as you desired — you have them."

Michaelis lifted the blotting-paper, searched amid some papers, stooped and looked under the table. When he rose, he was extremely pale. "These papers seem to have disappeared. I — I don't understand, they were here — and now — "

Miss Pim opened the door and, turning to the assembled men, she said in English: "And now — they are in English hands. Gentlemen, you are done for; the game is up; the sooner you surrender, unconditionally, the better."

And she slammed the door, turning the key. She was down the stairs and out of the building before the attendants realised that something unusual was going on. In slow, stolid German style they gathered outside the door and looked at each other.

"Something is going on here," they said, listening to the banging of fists on the door, and the ceaseless ringing of electric bells.

Deliberately they tried the door. "It is locked," said one, "and here is the key."

"I found it on the stairs," said another.

The Ministers burst out: "Did you see a woman? Did any one see a woman? — for it was a woman's voice. Oh, she has certainly escaped by now! The police must find her, — the stations must be guarded! Every house in Berlin must be searched!"

But no one had seen this woman, no description

of her could be given. It was not even certain that the unknown, unseen thing *was* a woman. The voice might well have been assumed. Consternation reigned at the Chancellery.

CHAPTER XIX

Miss Pim in the meanwhile sat in Von Buhlen's Restaurant rejoicing. At last she had secured something of value to England, something to give the Commander-in-Chief. These were her first fruits — very sweet and precious they were. She felt a glow of gladness not experienced since she left home.

The Ministers, she well knew, would not publish their loss, but the police would be busy, and woe to any one who could not give a very full and complete account of himself.

"I really must leave Berlin to-morrow," thought Miss Pim. "There is nothing to gain by lingering here, since I shall have to remain invisible most of the time." But with that gay confidence often engendered by success, Miss Pim resumed her substantial self on leaving the restaurant and sauntered along the Linden, until she found a café, where she could sit at a little table and watch the passers-by. Calling for hot coffee and buying a newspaper, filled with wholly fictitious accounts of great German victories, she looked about cheerfully. No one seemed to notice her, and she watched the people with the greatest interest. A quiet, well-dressed German, not

far off, was emptying the contents of his pockets on a marble-topped table. He put a little pile of copper on one side, another little pile of silver beyond, a gold pencil, a pen-knife, and various odds and ends, never once looking up.

Miss Pim was very puzzled when she saw another man at another table starting to do the same thing, whereupon the first man swept everything back to his pockets. Number two put coins down, and keys, and card-case, and sat there some time staring before him. Miss Pim was now thoroughly interested, and waited to see what the next move would be. Five minutes later, another individual appeared; he seated himself at the table next to Miss Pim, and she fairly jumped when she saw him beginning to place the contents of his pockets on the table before him, whereupon number two replaced all the articles he had taken out.

Number one now rose, also number two, and number three immediately re-pocketed his belongings and rose also. And before Miss Pim could in the least understand what it all meant, the three men stood round her. "Please make no resistance, and consider yourself under arrest. Escape is quite impossible, it will be to your interest to let this little — episode pass unobserved by the general public." Number one spoke with great suavity, and evidently fancied himself very much.

"I am quite willing," replied Miss Pim in German, "but I think you ought to sit down here and explain yourselves. It will be simpler and look more — natural. Sit down and tell me why you want to arrest me."

"Who are you? What are you doing in Berlin? Where are your permits, your passport?"

"Oh, dear me! Those questions are all easily answered. I am a very harmless, innocent person, a Swiss governess. I have all my papers at the Hotel Adlon. If you will accompany me there I will, of course, hand them over to you. Do I look like a guilty or dangerous person?" asked Miss Pim, smiling up at them. The men were evidently rather taken aback. "Do sit down and explain who I am supposed to be. Let me call for three liqueurs and some more coffee; we will then walk to the Adlon, as you don't seem to have any taxicabs about."

The German secret police are not accustomed to such amiable frankness. The absence of all guilty terror on Miss Pim's part was either the deepest cunning or the most transparent innocence; anyhow, there was no harm in accepting a little glass of *kümmel*, and talking over her case in a friendly way.

"You arrived here yesterday?"

"Yes, from Cologne."

"We knew that you came from Cologne, and that you had no passport."

"I explained that to the police there; I concealed nothing."

"What did you do last night?"

"I went to a kinema."

"Yes, that is true, but our men lost sight of you. You seem to evade observation very skilfully."

"Well, really, I have no intention of evading observation," said Miss Pim. "If I had, this is rather a public place for concealment. But I shall satisfy you completely in a very short while; tell me rather about yourselves — about Berlin — about the war."

The men drank their coffee thoughtfully. They were disappointed, this amiable Swiss woman was no dangerous spy, and the Cologne police inspector was an old fool.

"The war is terrible!" said number two, a young detective, warmed by the *kümmel.* "Our work is ever increasing and our pay decreases."

"Hush, Johann," said number one. "It is not good to converse with the suspected."

"I wish you would tell me of what I am suspected," said Miss Pim plaintively.

"Well, it looks very suspicious to be travelling without passport or police permit," said the man, eyeing her with disfavour.

"But I shall satisfy you in a few minutes," said Miss Pim amiably.

"That's as may be," grunted the official. "Then your appearance is somewhat English. If you turned out to be English after all," — and at the thought three pairs of eyes glistened, — "if you turned out to be English —" He paused, and number two, tossing off the last drop of *kümmel*, finished the sentence, "We shall all be sorry for you."

"If I were English, then, I should be shot," said Miss Pim pleasantly. "Would they torture me first, I wonder?"

"It is ill joking on such subjects. Germans do not like jokes," said number one shortly. "And now, I will trouble you to walk with us to the Adlon Hotel."

"Gladly," replied Miss Pim, rising, and facing the three men. Then, straightening herself, she pressed back her head, felt the quick spinal thrill, and vanished, swiftly moving back, and, gliding amongst the tables, sat down in a remote corner near a glass windscreen, immensely enjoying the discomfiture of the three, who darted about wildly, violently gesticulating, frantically questioning the old waiter and two waitresses. The proprietor of the Café Bauer appeared. He strode up to the three men very angrily, but when he heard that they belonged to the secret police, he became most conciliatory. He invited them

into the restaurant, where they doubtless discussed Miss Pim's escape over a bottle of fine old wine.

"And now for my luggage at the Adlon," said Miss Pim, with a sigh, as she left the café and walked down the Linden to the hotel. She had decided to go to Potsdam at once. The Kaiser might be there. Anyhow, it was safer to make enquiries there. Berlin was thoroughly awake now, and they had a full description of her. Perhaps it would be better to refit herself in Berlin shops before venturing to reappear, as in German clothes she would lose that "English look."

Miss Pim visited many great clothing shops, where she was not, of course, deterred by fantastic prices, the articles being hers for the taking, but the dresses, coats, and hats were so frightful in cut and style, so dreadful in colour, and shoddy in texture, she hesitated at parting with her good English homespun tweed. Finally she decided to discard her well-fitting tweed coat and soft white silk blouse, and to put on a green and yellow plaid merino blouse, sufficiently hideous to be thoroughly German and to wear a thin jacket of shiny black cloth. She selected a tall hat of violet straw with no brim to speak of, trimmed with pink roses, and a vivid purple veil. At an optician's in the Friedrich-strasse she selected a pair of large convex blue spectacles. These things she carried off to the Thiergarten, and, making a neat bundle of her

hat and coat, she thrust them into some bushes. Then, still invisible, she made her way down the Königgrätzer-strasse to the Potsdam station. She found the station crowded, and recognised one of the detectives of the Café Bauer, and as he was talking volubly to other men, she presumed they were detectives also. Indeed, these police spies looked the part so conspicuously that there was little difficulty in picking them out of any crowd.

Miss Pim wondered how, invisible, she would board the train. She could not expect to get a seat, and though the actual journey would not take much over half an hour, yet it might be difficult and even dangerous to stand up in a crowded carriage.

Before she could decide what to do the train came creaking and jolting into the station, and the people who had been waiting hours ran and pushed and fought each other to get seats. Miss Pim ran the length of the train without seeing the chance even of standing-room. Then she saw the conductor swing himself on to the long step of a carriage, unlock a door, and let himself in. Miss Pim, running as she had never run in all her life, caught hold of a fixed bar and pulled herself on to the step. The conductor was in a panelled compartment with a bench, a desk, and a pile of cases; clinging with one arm to the bar, she tried the handle, the door swung open and Miss Pim

scrambled in, and, panting for breath, sank down on one of the cases.

The train rattled along very slowly, taking quite an hour to run the sixteen miles to Potsdam. What an oasis it appeared in a sandy plain! — woods, little hills, larger hills beyond, all clothed to the summit with umbrageous trees; lakes, canals, rivers, everywhere verdure and water; it was soothing and refreshing after the heat and excitement of Berlin.

Miss Pim felt a great longing for a cup of real English tea. Her wrist watch marked five o'clock, but the sun seemed almost as fervid as at midday.

She made her way to a restaurant by the Stadtschloss. This place had a pleasant shady verandah on the river Havel, where big oleanders in tubs, gay with pink blossoms, gave agreeable promise of privacy. Before entering Gerhardt's Restaurant, Miss Pim resumed visibility, hardly realising the curious figure she presented, in her purple top-hat girt about with roses, her too narrow coat opening on the green and yellow plaid blouse. Her get-up certainly was German, and probably would seem smart and stylish to German eyes, but what would Froghurst have said?

A kindly old waiter brought her a comfortable basket-chair with cushions, and a little wooden footstool, and then begged to know what her distinguished Excellency would deign to have.

"Have you any tea?" He was doubtful, and this made Miss Pim doubtful. "Have you any coffee? I mean real coffee, not *ersatz-kaffee*."

"I understand, Excellency," he replied mournfully. "Herr Gerhardt may have a little in reserve for high personages, but — you see, the police are everywhere — it is dangerous to produce it."

"Oh! I will pay well, and say nothing," said Miss Pim, smiling, as she threw back her purple veil and removed her glasses.

All the old man's hesitation vanished, when she pressed a two-mark note into his withered hand. He dragged two oleander tubs nearer, put up a pliable wind-screen, and departed, leaving Miss Pim to a feeling of rest and security from prying eyes. Then came a tray, and Miss Pim found herself pouring out most fragrant pale golden tea — real China tea; and there was a little bowl of whipped cream, and thin slices of dark bread and fresh butter. The old waiter enjoyed her enjoyment. He stood there chatting about his youth, how he had been a waiter at the Langham Hotel. He regretted this war, "because, you know, I like and understand the English; had Her Excellency ever been to England?"

Miss Pim asked whether the Kaiser was at Potsdam.

No; he had gone to the eastern front. The Kaiser

was depressed, and preferred to withdraw himself from the public eye; when at Potsdam he kept in complete retirement and hardly ever left the palace and private grounds.

This was very bad news for Miss Pim, as it meant delay; it was no part of her programme to go to the East to hunt up the All Highest.

"And Von Hindenburg?"

"At Berlin, doubtless, or on the western front."

Potsdam had become quite uninteresting. Miss Pim listened drearily to the old waiter as he enumerated its attractions. The palaces she must not fail to visit; "but Potsdam, which was a pleasure resort, is now one of the saddest cities of Germany," he said with conviction. Miss Pim looked up enquiringly. "Because of the terrible number of wounded and dying brought here. These beautiful palaces, which, of course, you would only be permitted to view from without, are filled with the wounded. I have a brother at the Potsdam station. He says the trainloads that come by night are something too fearful to witness. A few trains come also by day, but the stations then are cleared, and I have also heard that the wounded are taken to the hospitals in closed furniture vans. You see, Excellency, it is not good for the public to know how many wounded we have."

Another customer now clamoured for coffee; the

waiter hurried off, and Miss Pim, having paid her bill, walked thoughtfully away.

She determined to spend the whole of the next day at Potsdam. The place was quiet and pleasant, the lakes and streams gave an appearance, if not a feeling, of coolness. The sun had disappeared in a glowing furnace; the east was already purple night, whilst the west still retained great reaches of pale gold and pink.

It was a very tired Miss Pim who stole, invisible, into the Palast Hotel. This time she visited the first floor, and found, as she expected, that the finest rooms were unoccupied.

After taking the precaution of putting up rugs and coverlets to prevent any ray of light in the room being seen in the passage, she sat at the open windows and enjoyed the breeze that rippled up from the Havel.

CHAPTER XX

It was imprudent to sit at the window of a lighted room; Miss Pim realised this when she smelt a cigar and heard the crunch of gravel in the little garden below the window. She drew the curtains and, feeling wakeful, doubtless owing to the strong green tea, she determined to try the effect of a game of patience; it always soothed her at Froghurst, and prepared the way for sleep.

Suddenly she heard a sound of scrambling and a heavy fall behind her. She turned in terror; the curtains parted and a short, toadlike German waddled into the room, bowing at every step.

Miss Pim felt cornered. She was convinced that invisibility would not save her. She pictured herself dodging round the room, this repulsive little monster groping about for her.

"Ach, this is an unpleasant way of entering," wheezed the stout little German, in English, "but there was no help for it; you *have* led me a dance, Miss Pim."

Miss Pim sat transfixed, still holding the knave of hearts.

"Now that you have seen me, and I have seen you,

have you any objection to my extinguishing this electric light," he said, again bowing. "It was *most* imprudent of you to sit at that lighted window. Still, I must n't complain, as my visit this evening is due to that imprudence. Miss Pim, I have been expecting you and I watched that station all day. How you escaped my lynx eyes is wonderful indeed." As he spoke he extinguished the lights, and Miss Pim's terror became really paralysing, when she heard him scuffle back to the table.

"Now, Miss Pim, let us understand each other, being both in the secret service of England. Yes," he repeated, hearing Miss Pim make an exclamation, "both in the secret service of England."

"But you are a German; nothing you can say will convince me to the contrary," said Miss Pim, finding her voice.

"Of course I am a German, but please talk lower, women are always more audible than men; I am of the German nobility — a Baron. I am, moreover, in the German Admiralty, and, I may add, a very highly placed official."

"And you sell — your country," said Miss Pim, unable to conceal her contempt.

"That is my personal affair, and in no way concerns you," replied the Baron dryly. "I have been ordered to look out for you, at Potsdam, at about this

date, in order to give you advice and instructions. You seek a private, unannounced interview with the Kaiser."

"And I hear he is in the East," said Miss Pim.

"He is not in the East; he is here, at the Neues Palast."

Miss Pim started joyfully.

"Are you sure?"

"I saw him there to-day. I have not been told what you seek to gain by such an interview, but I may tell you that it is quite useless to attempt it. By no trick or subterfuge will you gain access to His Majesty. It is not even known at Potsdam that he is here. He has one of his morbid, hysterical fits on; his own attendants hardly dare approach him. How, then, do you intend to proceed?"

Miss Pim was silent.

"And of what use would it be to interview the Kaiser? What do you hope from such an interview?"

Miss Pim remained silent.

"Oh, I am not trying to learn secrets," continued the German. "I allow you must be clever to have got this far, but you have a very much harder nut to crack when you attempt to interview the Kaiser, and the Kaiser in one of his ferocious moods. It might make good copy for a journalist, but I gather you are

here to obtain information likely to be of use to the Commander-in-Chief and to your Government. From the Kaiser you will obtain nothing; he is a vain mountebank, maddened by failure; if you succeeded in reaching his presence you would never escape, — you would be shot dead on the spot. This attempt is really suicidal."

Miss Pim did not know how to answer this strange German, without giving herself away, so she maintained an obstinate silence, which evidently angered the consequential little spy.

"Madame, your discretion passes the bounds and becomes incivility."

"I do not mean to be uncivil," she replied. "But I am much startled by your visit, and you have not, so far, told me anything which I did not know, excepting, of course, the fact that the Kaiser is at Potsdam; for that piece of information I am grateful, but, sir, you appear anxious to question me, and, frankly, I refuse to be cross-examined."

Miss Pim heard in the dark that mirthless laugh, so characteristic of Prussians.

"Well, I ought n't to blame you for being cautious," he said. "But it is difficult to help, or to advise you, seeing that you do not trust me."

Miss Pim thought this over. "You are very kind, Baron, but I really do not see how you can possibly

help me. Still, your advice may be valuable on one point."

"Ho, ho, we are coming round; let me hear this one point," chaffed the fat little Baron.

"If I fail to see the Kaiser, is there — anything else I could do in that palace to get information?"

"I repeat, you will get no information, as you call it, from the Kaiser or any one else, pray be assured of that. But in some room there, occupied by the 'All Highest,' there is a very compromising correspondence of the Kaiser's with Von Bethmann-Hollweg; also copies of letters he wrote to his bosom friend the late General von Hulsen, who died at the end of 1913. The Kaiser, so I understand, wrote quite openly to Von Hulsen about *The War*, and between them they decided it should be after the harvest of 1914. These letters are known to exist; they certainly would be worth having, invaluable, indeed, when the true history of this war comes to be written; but whether they are here or in Berlin, who shall say? One thing I *do* know, the Kaiser carries a small gold key folded back inside the big seal ring he wears on the third finger of the right hand. This, I imagine, is the master-key which opens private drawers or bureaus of the 'All Highest.' The only chance of getting these letters is to obtain the key, and I can safely defy you to accomplish such a feat. Well, I dare not stay here any

longer. Would you like to send a letter to England? I am sending papers by a — neutral."

Miss Pim shook her head; then suddenly she decided to send a few lines to Lesley. "May I have the light? I think I *should* like to write to my niece."

She drew a hotel blotter towards her, with sheets of hotel paper. Cutting off the address and the picture of the hotel giving a view of the river Havel, she wrote: —

My dear Lesley, — I am in perfect health, and very busy; do not be anxious about me. Please tell Bessie to put naphthaline balls to my furs, after shaking them well in the sun. It is also advisable to pass a house-flannel steeped in turpentine on the carpets under the beds, to keep away moths. I quite forgot to beg you most earnestly to see that the oats given to Bobbie are bruised, as his teeth are so old he cannot get proper nourishment; of course, James knows this, but being old himself he may think it too much trouble.

Ever your loving

AUNTIE PURR.

She addressed an envelope and then passed the letter across to the Baron, whose keen eyes were reading her face with such acuity she felt as though they were two insects walking over her features.

"I do not ask to read your secrets, Madame," protested the Baron.

"But I beg you to read my letter," Miss Pim

smiled. "Since you so kindly make yourself my courier, it is necessary you should see what I write."

"So you write in code," said the Baron, after attentively perusing the note.

"Indeed, I have done no such thing. I do not know any code, and certainly my niece would not be able to decode anything I might write."

"But, then, what is the meaning of this?"

"Just what I say; does it surprise you?"

"Very much. If you were not English, I should say it is incredible, but you English are such an amazing people, so idiotically cool and — unimaginative. Here you are going to certain death, and you write about — preventives against moths! Well, if daring could help you, you would succeed, but daring will avail you nothing. When do you propose making the attempt?"

"To-morrow evening."

"Now, do not forget the royal apartments are on the left side of the mighty building, as it faces you, looking out on the Wild Park. You may easily lose your way; there are three hundred rooms."

"You surprise me!" exclaimed Miss Pim. "I understood that the palace was not a palace at all, but rather a fine country house, of an English timbered style of architecture, standing in an English-looking park."

"You must be thinking of the Babelsberg Palace, on the other side of the Havel. The Kaiser is not there; it now belongs to the Crown Prince. Oh! the Kaiser used to live there, but not for some years; he now occupies the Neues Palast, in the Sans-Souci, quite a good walk from here. But you must not dress so — so showily. I caught sight of you at the Gerhardt Café to-day. That hat is what the French would call 'voyant'; decidedly so."

Miss Pim blushed. "I got those frightful things, hoping to look more German. I got them yesterday in Berlin."

"Well, there is German and German. I should advise your getting hold of a complete costume of deep mourning. In such a dress you are likely to pass unobserved, for to-day it is the universal garb throughout Germany; but unless you positively steal the things, I do not see how you will get so much as a pocket handkerchief. You are not permitted to buy *any clothing*, unless you can produce the clothes you wore *in rags*."

"I will do my best," said Miss Pim, "but shall I see you after — after —"

"On no account," said the Baron, growing pale at the thought. "You must never approach me, nor write to me, nor even recognise me; it would mean my ruin, probably my death."

"I will take care, then, to avoid you," said Miss Pim; "and if chance ever brings me face to face with you, I promise not to recognise you; but I should like to convey to you the fact that I escaped with my life, so, if I can, I will stick an envelope in this window, and if I succeed in interviewing the Kaiser, I will put two envelopes against the pane, and if I get those incriminating papers — why, then, see, I will put an envelope in the other window."

The fat little German tried to look sentimental, but he only succeeded in looking very comic, as he stood up and took Miss Pim's hand.

"Farewell! May you succeed, charming, mysterious lady. I can understand the accepted methods of the secret service, but your methods, I confess, are quite beyond me. How you manage to travel without a passport, to eat without food tickets, to enter a hotel without a police permit, it is quite miraculous; you move about with apparent freedom, and complete self-confidence. If you knew my people as I know them, why, you would die of fright and save them the trouble of killing you."

"I undertook a certain task, Baron, and I am anxious to carry it through; I hope I shall succeed; there are moments when I feel nervous, but they pass. Well, good-night and good-bye."

"As I am staying at this hotel," said the Baron,

"I would prefer going out of this room by the door. If you will allow me, I will again extinguish the light, and cautiously look out."

Miss Pim heard nothing after the room was darkened. She waited, then, creeping to the door, found it partly open, and she knew the German had made good his escape.

Locking up her possessions, she descended, invisible, to the dining-room, where she saw the Baron very intent on the menu.

She fetched her supper and ate it in a remote corner; she was sickened by the food in Germany. Of course, under the circumstances, she was not limited to quantity, but the quality was so bad, Miss Pim feared she would become seriously ill if she lingered very much longer in Germany. Everybody and everything were depressed and depressing. Every one seemed to know that Nemesis was about to demand payment. The German people, who had exulted over the fall of Belgium, the expected enslavement of France, and the coming subjugation of England, now saw, not only their own bitter defeat, but also the annihilation of all hope of a future successful war.

There was something awful in this new strange tameness of the baffled brute. Miss Pim could almost hear the snarling sob of the beast of prey, and yet she

knew that the deliverance of humanity could only come when the yelps and snarls turned into the howl of utter defeat.

She watched the officers, the few German women, the cynical, traitorous Baron, and she felt in their company something that amounted to physical shrinking and loathing.

It was a long while before she slept. The sweet night air, cooled by the river Havel, played with the curtains, and puffed gently at Miss Pim, saying: "You can't be German. Germans never admit me. I always beat in vain against their closed windows."

At last the tender breeze brought sleep, and Miss Pim dreamt she was gathering roses, great bunches of roses, at Froghurst Manor.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next day Miss Pim wandered, invisible, about Potsdam, but the dull regularity of the buildings soon drove her to the parks. The formal French garden of Sans-Souci appeared to her unattractive; perhaps the fierce heat and lack of shade made the architectural garden unpleasing to her. The straight lines of clipped hedges, the long tiers of terraces, the multitude of stiff fountains and statues, with here and there a temple or an artificial ruin, fatigued the eye. Miss Pim sat down by the great fountain and stared up at the broad flight of a hundred steps leading to the Palace of Sans-Souci, but felt not the smallest desire to mount them. Leaving the formal garden, she went through the park to the Orangery Palace, another immense building in the Italian style, with towers, and terraces, and the inevitable statue of a William or a Frederick. Berlin and Potsdam are dotted all over with effigies of these monarchs in stone, bronze, or marble. Miss Pim also noted the quite extraordinary number of single figures, groups, or equestrian statues, all emblematic of war.

At last she came to the New Palace, a vast quadrangular building of brick, with long cloistral colon-

nades; here she must return at night and interview the Kaiser. It might have been well to reconnoitre then and there, but the long walk and the great heat proved so exhausting, Miss Pim even wondered how she would get back to Potsdam.

But after refreshment at the Stadtkönigsberg Hotel, and a cup of tolerable coffee, for which she paid four marks, Miss Pim became cooler and almost somnolent, and it was quite late in the afternoon when she remembered the Baron's advice, and decided to forage about in Potsdam for less conspicuous clothes. In a very select establishment she discovered mourning attire of a good cut and fine texture. She was trying on one of the very sombre crêpe bonnets with long veils, when an attendant, seeing Miss Pim's purple hat, snatched it up with an exclamation. Miss Pim thereupon decided to keep the bonnet she was trying on and with the black dress and jacket rolled up under her arm, she hurried back to her room at the Palast Hotel. Miss Pim had been tempted by a rich silk mantle, but, remembering that the rustle of silk would always betray her presence, she had selected a long, loose coat of fine black cashmere, edged with crêpe and a skirt to match. Miss Pim fairly gasped when she saw herself in the long mirror. These trappings of grief somehow did not harmonise with her sensible, cheerful face, but when the immense crêpe

veil was drawn over the bonnet and fell almost to her feet, Miss Pim viewed this monument of woe with awe.

Having resumed visibility, she walked slowly down the Wilhelm-strasse really somewhat oppressed by her clothes; but after a while she forgot herself, and soon the normal Miss Pim was flinging back her embarrassing veil, and gazing in at the shop windows, or watching the Berlin crowds listlessly wandering about the streets. Excursionists from Berlin, even in war-time, came out to Potsdam, attracted by woods, hills, and lakes.

The Uhlan barracks appeared empty, but on the great drill-ground of the Hussars' barracks, near the Berlin Gate, she saw a great number of young Germans being drilled, boys of sixteen and seventeen; and down a side street she saw an old spectacled schoolmaster actually goose-stepping along the sidewalk followed by his pupils, boys from six to ten or twelve years old.

Miss Pim asked a woman at the door of a house, who was watching the strange procession, why children were made to do drill so very young. "Oh, it is soldiering morning, noon, and night — these little ones are preparing for the next war. I used to think war was a fine thing, but we are sick of the horror of it. We were promised a short victorious campaign;

we were to have Paris, Calais, England, in a few months; but here we are in the fourth year of the war, and every family in Germany is bereaved. Pardon me, gnädige Frau, you have suffered recently?"

Miss Pim did not reply, but again looked at the young cadets drilling in the barrack yard. Then, turning to the woman, she asked: "When shall we have peace?"

The woman in a low voice replied: "It is said, it is whispered, that we shall only get peace when we surrender; there is not a wife nor a mother in Germany who would not gladly surrender this very day, rather than continue."

As evening approached, Miss Pim decided that she would dine at the Staff Officers' Mess, and from there proceed to the New Palace. She left her rucksack at the hotel, taking only her handbag, after emptying the contents into one of the drawers, which she locked.

The officers' quarters were in the Stadtschloss, and all the officers were at mess in a room off the fine hall. Miss Pim entered unseen, feeling too excited, too "wound up," to eat. At a rather long table fourteen men were seated. Dinner was nearly over, and they lolled back in their chairs sipping sweet champagne and smoking big cigars. Some of them had but recently recovered from wounds and were on light duty;

others looked very ill and worn; there were few sound men amongst them. Though the wines circulated freely, and in the greatest variety, they appeared sober enough. Miss Pim sat down on a velvet couch, behind two particularly careworn officers, and listened to their conversation. It appeared to be on the shortage of essentials: horses, winter clothing for the men, leather, rubber, etc. The elder man kept rubbing his face wearily, as the younger and more voluble one said repeatedly: "So you see, you see the difficulty — no rubber — you see — you see the trouble — no copper —"

Suddenly the elder man asked abruptly: "What about the Englishwoman, that spy at Berlin? Has she been caught?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other; "you may depend on it, they have got her by now."

"I heard — only, mark you, I don't in the least vouch for it — that she was present at a private conference, presided over by Michaelis, and that she stole a lot of maps and most valuable papers, from right under his nose. There were awful scenes, and there is a huge sum offered for her apprehension."

"Would n't I like to catch her!" said the younger man; "my debts are such a burden, I hardly know what will become of me."

"Well, she is n't likely to come here, where there's

nothing doing, unless she comes to note our wounded as they are carried from the train."

"What! with all those spies and detectives and agents at the stations? Not likely."

"We are shooting that other English spy some time to-morrow."

"Dear me! Another English one!"

"Yes, and a woman, too. She was English governess to Baron Munchausen's children when war broke out; as the Baron naturally refused to keep her in his house, she was arrested and interned for some months; then she was allowed to go and live in a *pension* in Belgium. Later she heard that an officer, an Englishman she was engaged to, was a prisoner at Liège; so she must needs thrust herself there. The man escaped, and she was accused of getting him out, and helping another officer to escape, and for that she is to be shot. The Governor, not liking the responsibility, has, I understand, asked the Kaiser whether she shall be shot or imprisoned for life. It's a disagreeable business, but these women spies are more dangerous than the men — they must be got rid of, otherwise we should be overrun by them."

"Still, getting your lover away is n't quite spying."

"No; that is why they are referring it to His Majesty."

"Where is he? At Potsdam?"

"I heard he was at Berlin; one never knows; he goes about very secretly; he is n't popular just now."

"Well, Colonel Füstner said something about his being here; he had a fearful row with the Crown Prince, and is now in one of his unapproachable moods. I pity his valet, don't you?"

"The Crown Prince is really behaving disgracefully. You know Anna Bauer of the Walhalla? Would you believe it, he —"

Miss Pim moved off to another group gravely discussing the chances of peace.

"I still believe we shall pull it off with Russia; why, we are spending millions there, and we have awfully good agents at Petrograd."

"I don't believe in using men of our own nationality; our best helpers are Russians — and in England, Englishmen."

"Still, we got Tribitsche, the Hungarian so-called Lincoln, into the English Parliament, and he is n't the *only one*."

"But we do better by using the native. In England there are plenty of fools playing our game, and, of course, there are many to whom we are paying out good German gold; in China, also, we have to pay. Chang-hsun required a very big sum to restore the boy emperor."

"And did not succeed."

"Ah! but he very nearly *did* succeed. Whereas that ass Major Pappenheim, who tried to blow up the Siberian bridge, was skilfully got rid of by the Russians; and lots of our fellows in America have failed just because we tried to pull off the trick ourselves. We should use the material of each country. Har Dayal in India is an excellent agent, and we had others in Persia; those are scattered now, but we shall look them up by and by.

"In France we have good friends, some most able Frenchmen, though maybe rather under a cloud. You see, our German agents are not sufficiently well acquainted with the characteristics of the different nations.

"Would any of *our* men have had the wit to plead with Englishmen as did an eminent English writer the other day, who begged them to talk over peace conditions with us on the ground that we were *penitent?* Is n't that exquisite? We Germans penitent! So the English expect to see the German nation performing an act of penitence, beating its breast and sitting down in sackcloth and ashes, and abasing itself by crawling beneath the yoke of contemptible exactions!

"The English author goes on to say that England should meet us at Stockholm, or anywhere, to talk matters over, believing that if England assures Germany a tolerable national existence, — mark the

word *tolerable!* — then the grateful German democracy will overthrow the supports of militarist imperialism within the German Empire."

"Why do you quote such rubbish to us?" growled a Colonel.

"Why? To show you what goes down with the British. Was there ever such an idiotic people? Still, such talk is really and truly helpful to us, especially if such tosh helps to bring about a conference at which these simpletons would attend. What we want now is a conference, and that is only to be obtained by smooth words, by appearing to be in 'a chastened mood.' We should make use of native talent in every country we are fighting. In Italy, we have — a good friend; in Russia, we had the Empress, and Rasputin and Stuermer; to-day we have any number of supporters there. But why enumerate further?

"In England there are newspapers which you might imagine to be subsidized by us. Perhaps they are; I know we tried to buy French newspapers; so it is quite likely we have an interest in some English papers. Shall we drink, then, to our English *friends?*"

This was greeted by an Homeric laugh.

"We'll bring down the Britishers yet," shouted a fair-haired youth with a pasty complexion; "and if we don't, our sons will, so let us drink to the next war."

"When I was in hospital," said a huge fellow, carrying his arm in a sling, "I soothed myself when in pain by thinking of what we should do in England when we landed; I let myself imagine we were marching through Kent. I saw —"

"Hold your tongue, Lehmann! I know what you did in Belgium, so I don't fancy hearing a recital of your day-dreams. Oh! we'll kill all right, and destroy, when we get there; I don't see Germans then in a 'penitent or chastened mood.' We'll smash the English yet, yes — and enjoy doing it; but wait till we do — let them but give us a conference; if we can talk, and negotiate, we shall win. And now for the dancing-girl at Herzberg's rooms."

The officers jumped up, and, going to a table in the big hall, where they had deposited their weapons, they commenced buckling on their swords and pistol-holsters.

Miss Pim followed them, and, picking up an automatic pistol, which she put into her handbag, passed out into the dark streets.

As she entered the Park of Sans-Souci, the moon appeared in full radiance, the cold glory lighting every path and alley. Miss Pim never forgot that night, as she walked gravely towards the New Palace, now in the inky shadow of trees, now in the colourless moonlight, herself shadowless.

The palace gates were shut, and sentries paced the colonnade within the great quadrangle. There were lights in the outer buildings, but the long lines of windows were darkened.

Miss Pim made détours, but saw no open gate, no door ajar where she might enter. Returning to the great gates of the main entrance, she saw the push-button of an electric bell shining white in the moonlight. There was nothing for it; she must ring like a visitor. For quite thirty seconds she pressed the bell, and saw two men, accompanied by two soldiers, cross the courtyard and approach the gates. They peered out through the bars, but seemed indisposed to open, seeing no one there. Miss Pim assumed a gruff voice and shouted in German: "Open, scoundrels, and do not keep your betters waiting."

At once the porters swung open one side of the great gate and, stepping forward, looked up and down and roundabout. Miss Pim passed in, as four soldiers joined the astonished porters. She left them quarrelling, and passed along the great frontage of windows to the right of the building, on the Wild Park side. Finding no entrance, she retraced her steps and walked to the left wing. At the farther end, near an open door, servant-girls were larking with sentries; one girl was throwing food, bread and sausage, at a soldier, who caught it in his mouth like a clever dog.

Miss Pim brushed past them and ran down a long passage; kitchens, butteries, pantries opened on to this passage; a leather-padded swing door led into one of the corridors of the palace. Opening a lofty door on her left, Miss Pim found herself in a long hall or gallery lit up by the moon; the polished floor gleamed like silver, and all along the walls the moon shone on upright glass cases, containing shells and minerals, which sparkled and glittered so brilliantly that Miss Pim had the impression of walking at the bottom of the sea. Everywhere she saw shells and corals and rocks, a most unexpected and truly remarkable sight. This gallery reached the whole length of the palace. Opening the door at the end, she found a square hall and staircase leading up to the private Imperial apartments. Ascending the fine staircase, she heard voices and doors opening and closing. The first floor was lighted at intervals by shaded lights. A huge German in a Jaeger uniform walked up and down, turning sharply, as though on parade.

Miss Pim watched and listened; voices could be heard in one of the rooms which was on the soldier's beat; she paused at the door, waiting for the soldier to pass, and as he did so she grasped the door handle, turned it gently, and found herself in the bedchamber of the All Highest. It required all her self-possession

quickly and gently to close the door and walk into the room, every detail of which was forever to be photographed on her brain. The room was spacious, but too lofty, thus wanting in perfect proportion.

At first she saw only the bed, softly lighted by a silk-shaded electric lamp. The bed was low, immense, and very flat; far up overhead a golden eagle held a ring in its fierce, curved beak, and from the ring descended thick blue-silk curtains of woven damask, which parted and drew back like a woman's hair on a white forehead. The light fell on the Kaiser sitting up very erect, hardly leaning at all on the piled-up pillows. Dressed in white silk pyjamas, he sat clasping the hands of a man in faultless evening dress, a burly fellow with a golden beard and brown hair. The Kaiser looked old, but less old than she had expected. The bony frame of his face stood out sharp, leaving shaded hollows which moulded the face so that it might have belonged to a bust of Anxiety and Sorrow. The eyes were fierce and restless, rather bulging, and even scared in expression; the mustache was quite white, and much smaller than in his earlier portraits. Miss Pim thought: "Here is a man who has a look of the Kaiser," but she would never have picked him out as the All Highest. Somewhat unshaven, he had a neglected appearance which was heightened by the disorder of his abundant white hair, which stuck up in

a way we call "staring" when applied to the coat of an animal; his complexion was well tanned by sun and air, leaving a white top to the forehead where the helmet or cap protected it from the light; the man looked curiously insignificant, and yet — thought Miss Pim — how extraordinarily significant, for here was the man who had caused the death of millions, soaked Europe in the red blood of youth, and caused a river of tears to bathe the world. This — this was His Imperial Majesty, who, wishing above all things to bulk large in history, had throned himself on crime and crowned himself with infamy.

Perdita Pim gazed on that face, partly familiar, partly strange and unknown. Surely this was the Evil One, who had to be loosed a little season out of his prison and who went out "to deceive nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea."

He was speaking querulously to the stout German: "Sit here on the bed, Anton; talk to me, I am so troubled. You would n't believe what I have to put up with from Villee. Am I not Kaiser? Why! I could degrade him to sub-lieutenant to-morrow, if I pleased. He and his Junker friends got Bethmann pushed out. My dear Bethmann, you know, Anton, Bethmann and I, we understood each other; he never

irritated me. Now Villee and his detestable set got Michaelis in Bethmann's place. Ach! Michaelis, a nobody at all, just their tool. When I go and speak of what I will do to those *verflucht* English, Michaelis jumps up and talks of peace negotiations. He's just a weather-cock, turns every way and is no man for me. Anton, it is bad for my health to get so angry; my stomach and brain suffer. Yesterday, but for you, my beloved Anton, I should have killed Von Walsrode, — yes, with these hands, in spite of the gout in this finger."

"Dear me! Gout, Your Majesty? I don't believe a young and vigorous man like Your Majesty suffers from gout; besides, you are so abstemious, a pattern for us all. Gout! No, that is impossible."

A smile of relief flickered across the Kaiser's face. "But see this finger; it is red and swollen," he said plaintively, holding his right hand up for Anton's inspection, who took it with the gentleness of a woman.

"No, no, it is not gout; see, this heavy gold ring is rather tight, your finger has swelled, and there is a little eczema caused by moisture. You should slip the ring off at night, and put on a little powder to cool the hand."

"Perhaps you are right," said the Kaiser. "But it is hard to get off." And the All Highest worked

the ring off with an effort. "Put it there beside my watch, near the glass of orange-flower water."

Miss Pim's eyes shone with eager gladness. "The Key Ring!" Kneeling on a velvet settee at the foot of the bed, she leant her arms on the carved footboard and watched the Kaiser, as though she must read him through and through and photograph the image of him on her brain.

"You soothe and quiet me, Anton," he said sentimentally, lying back on the great square pillows.

"There, there, it's all right," murmured the big German in the tones of a monthly nurse.

"Hindenburg worries me," continued the All Highest fretfully. "He knows I can't stand the sight of blood, yet he always wants to drag me to battlefields — especially in the East. Why, I shiver these hot nights, only to think of the cold I endured last winter in Poland, and now he wants me to visit Riga. I dread a cold more than anything, and I had to stand in the snow talking to the men. No, I will not go again; but, Anton, it is worse in the West, you know, to see dead men and wounded men. They ought to be cleared away when I come. Why don't they clear away those — awful — bodies? And it hurts me to hear men groaning — you understand, Anton?"

"Yes, your Majesty, I know better than any one how sensitive you are, how full of deep feeling; you

cannot hear the groans of your brave warriors without acute suffering."

"Yes; it is just that; how you do understand me, Anton! No one realises how I shudder at the sight of blood!"

"Ah, well! Your Majesty must keep away from battlefields for a bit."

"And yet the Crown Prince harasses me to go to his front to address his men. He says they are discouraged, and that they are beginning to surrender. Ach! he's no good as a soldier — only think, Anton, of the men he has lost! Why, I lie awake night after night, especially when I am upset, as I have been all this week, first by one, then by another."

There was a pause. Anton evidently wished to say something, but the Kaiser's mood was unpropitious.

Then William the Second, who was lying back, opened his eyes and smiled. "My friend, you are getting fat, in spite of the food restrictions; your dress suit is too tight." And the Kaiser laughed boisterously seeing Anton's embarrassment. He always enjoyed finding a raw spot. "Yes, you are losing your figure, and with it you will lose your power over women."

"Your Majesty is pleased to make merry, but I came not for mere jesting, I came really to petition Your Majesty."

"Surely I have been troubled enough to-day," said the Kaiser, moving his head restlessly on the pillows.

"I should have waited till to-morrow, but by then it will be too late," replied the big German seriously.

The Kaiser, still in a cheerful vein, pretended to look shocked. "Oh, Anton, you are a sad dog — some new love affair? You want me to order the husband to the front?"

"No, Your Majesty; it is not a petition for myself, but this evening young Dötzenberg arrived from Berlin; there has been an informal meeting of some of the Ministers, and they are very anxious that you should remit the sentence of death passed on that English girl, Miss Lucy Price, at Liège."

The Kaiser's face clouded. "This is Michaelis; and since when has he grown tender towards the English?" he growled.

"Oh, it is not tenderness, Your Majesty; it is only policy. Michaelis says that shooting this young woman will have a very bad effect with neutrals. She is not a spy and she only helped her fiancé to escape; it is an affair of sentiment."

"Nevertheless, an Englishman escaped, and she is English, — that is enough. The Governor of Belgium is only doing his duty; let her die."

"But, Your Majesty, Michaelis says it will have a deplorable effect in England and in America."

The Kaiser sat up with a jerk, his face twisted with rage, his lips drawn back from his teeth. "You quote Michaelis *to me!* And he thinks my actions shall depend on the effect made in England and America! Why, every man, woman, or child of those accursed countries I would gladly see killed, nay, I would gladly kill with these hands. As for neutrals! Faugh! They sicken me, craven dogs. Holland's turn shall come — my brave men will make short work of the Dutch. Sweden and Norway had better look out; those wooden houses would burn nicely. Neutrals! Has my policy ever been dictated by the opinion of enemies and neutrals? The Governor of Belgium is after my own heart. He shall be decorated, — mark that, — decorated! Let Michaelis notify him that for this particular act of justice, the execution of this Englishwoman, he shall receive from me the Order of the Red Eagle."

Miss Pim turned her eyes away from the fiendish face of the Kaiser — away from the stout German seated beside him — and she saw an English girl, waiting in a prison at Liège for the last dawn, when she was to step out into the prison-yard, there to die for saving her beloved. Silence had fallen. Anton rose abruptly, making a military salute.

"It must be as the All Highest wills. I motor back at once to Berlin. Any other orders from Your Majesty?"

"No," said the Kaiser shortly, closing his eyes.

Again bowing, Anton turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXII

Miss Pim, without any special precautions to move noiselessly, walked up to the bedside and took up the Kaiser's ring, which she ran on to her left thumb; then swiftly she returned to the foot of the bed; the world would be well rid of this monster, and she must be the instrument of its deliverance. Taking the revolver out of her bag, she calmly eyed the All Highest; he was sitting up alert, he had heard some movement in the room.

"He shall see me, I will not shoot, unseen," thought Miss Pim. Then, straightening herself till she felt the short spinal spasm, she reappeared and covered the Kaiser with the automatic.

"You abject villain," she cried, "prepare to die!" and fired. But there was only a click; perhaps the first shot had been spent. Miss Pim, thoroughly roused, clicked the pistol again and again, then hurled it at the Kaiser, who was yelling to the guard. He had thrown himself out of bed and was dodging about the room as Miss Pim kept getting between him and the door. She had no sooner flung away the pistol than the tall Jaeger rushed in followed by other attendants. In a flash Miss Pim became in-

visible, but her excitement was so great she feared that the beating of her heart would betray her presence. The Kaiser, still shaking, recovered his dignity with an effort. Seating himself on the bed, he directed his servants to search every corner and cupboard. When Anton appeared in a huge motor-coat and goggles, Miss Pim's emotion took the form of laughter, which she could not stop; it was so wild and uncanny that every one stood as though petrified.

"You hear that, Anton?" said the Kaiser; "it is the mad Englishwoman."

"What Englishwoman?"

"As soon as you left a woman, dressed in black from head to foot, crept up to this bed and fired at me repeatedly, or rather attempted to fire, but the pistol appears not to have been loaded. She then hurled it at me. Yes, there it is," as one of the servants picked up the pistol.

"You see, this is no dream — no disordered fancy. Besides, you heard that hyena laugh — she must be hidden somewhere."

Miss Pim edged along to a door, opened it gently, and slipped into a large dark room. She felt her way along by the wall on the left till she came to a door, locked inside. Turning the key very softly, she let herself out into the corridor, and descended the staircase. She must now commence the hunt for the

papers. Which was the Kaiser's private sitting room? She entered room after room, — suites of empty, unlived-in apartments, — and at last decided that the room she sought must be on the same floor as the bedchamber. Cautiously re-ascending, she peeped into many rooms faintly illumined by the moon. At the end of the long passage she entered a fine library, built somewhat after the English style. Switching on the electric light, she decided this must be the Kaiser's private sanctum — bad works of art by himself, frightful designs in clay, photographs of children and grandchildren, but, most of all, photographs of himself in every conceivable uniform; miniatures of himself painted on ivory, an oil portrait of the All Highest on his favourite charger. Certainly this was the Kaiser's room, — could it be doubted? She sat down at a beautiful writing-table with ormolu legs, and tried to open the drawers, which were locked. Taking off the ring, she turned the key out, by a hinge, and the drawers opened; with feverish haste she looked through the papers, but they were mostly architectural plans by the Kaiser, mosques and Buddhist temples he intended building in the conquered East.

Miss Pim, as she sat there, looked round the room for any likely places where the Kaiser might place his private correspondence. Her eyes fell on a tall cabinet of drawers, of an exquisite grain of mahogany known

as *letter* wood set in a lacework of gilded metal. The drawers were all fastened by a single band of wood running down the side, which was locked. The gold key opened this easily, the confining bar turned back on a hinge and every drawer could be opened. Miss Pim pulled out one after another, and was rewarded by finding each drawer contained a year's most private and intimate correspondence, neatly tied up and docketed, every package dated. Hastily descending to the last five drawers, she emptied the contents on to the floor, closing each drawer as she emptied it; the last was only half full, and less orderly. She was standing there, wondering how to carry off all these papers, when she heard voices and Anton entered with a tall young officer she had seen at mess. There was only one thing to do: Miss Pim subsided on the heap, just as a hen would over her chicks, all the papers disappearing even as she herself had disappeared.

Anton was perturbed. He sat on the edge of the table, sombrely eyeing his big feet; the officer sat down in one of the large easy-chairs and lit a cigarette.

"What do *you* think it all means?" he asked, striking a match.

"Oh! I am hanged if I know," replied Anton ruefully.

"But this story of a woman all in black — what do you make of it?" continued the other.

"Well, some one *did* laugh in that room, and a pistol *was* picked up."

"But it is one of our own service automatics, you know, and why should n't the old boy have thrown it there himself? As for the laugh, in the mood he is in, he would as soon laugh as shout. I think, Anton, the Kaiser has attacks of insanity."

"Oh, do hold your tongue, as if there was n't trouble enough! I have had such a beastly day — the people are just wild for food. I came from Berlin this afternoon; they were firing on the women in the streets; some women threw themselves before the trains at the Lehrte Station. I believe that lame devil Keutsick is at the bottom of all this trouble. He was at Cologne the other day, and tried to speak at the Conference, urging the people to strike for peace, and do, I know not what. Then he slipped away, but the police say he is hiding in Berlin. However, they'll get him three days hence. There is to be a big Socialist gathering at which he is to speak, so we shall get him there, and he will be sent to the front."

"What! That lame fellow?"

"Yes, I believe he hobbles a bit. He will be trained for a week or so at the machine gun, and then, one fine day, our Reformer will be put in the front

trenches, chained by the leg to his gun, — and good-bye, friend Keutsick."

"Well, I must be off. I return without the reprieve for that English girl. It is rather horrible, executing a woman for helping her lover to escape."

"Is that so? Did the lover get clear away?"

"Yes; and the poor wretch does n't know the girl is to pay with her life for his escape."

"Everything is horrible, and my position of aide-de-camp to the Crown Prince is the most horrid of all."

"Well, I am off," said Anton. "I hope the All Highest won't break out again. You are here for to-night, so if the Englishwoman in black reappears you will have to catch her and attend her execution."

And, readjusting his goggles, Anton and his friend went out, extinguishing the lights.

Miss Pim sat there till all was quiet; then, turning on the light, she examined the papers, but decided not to untie the packets. She spread a silken table-cover on the floor, and placed the heap of papers in the centre and knotted up the corners of the silk; then shouldering this strange bundle, she walked quietly past the two guards, down the grand staircase to one of the farther apartments, where the furniture was shrouded in linen sheets, and, lying down with the letter bundle for pillow, she slept uneasily,

waking with heavy starts and sighs. Perhaps the contents of those letters exercised some baneful influence, perhaps the thought of Keutsick's danger troubled her. But, as the morning advanced, she slept better, and it was quite nine o'clock before Miss Pim swung her feet to the floor, and decided that she badly needed breakfast.

"It will go hard if I cannot find a breakfast and a bath in the New Palace," thought Miss Pim. After much exploration, a very up-to-date bathroom was discovered, but the water was cold. However a cold bath, with the thermometer rising to eighty, was quite endurable, though Miss Pim always preferred hot water to cold. Refreshed, she made her way along the gallery of shells and mineralogical specimens to the kitchens, intent on hot coffee — real coffee, not the disgusting substitute — and real bread.

"It is only in Germany," thought Miss Pim, "that one's mind keeps running on food."

She found a stout German chef, very busy over the "frühstück," the early breakfast. Coffee was being poured boiling into silver jugs, with discreet little blue flames beneath.

Footmen, with trays ready, waited for the hot milk which was palpitating in the great copper saucepans.

Hot milk rolls, thin slices of ham, butter-pats imprinted with the Royal Eagle, honey in the comb,

dishes of smoked delicacies, and *pâtés de foie gras* were allotted to each tray. As soon as the jugs of milk and coffee were placed on the tray, a footman snatched it up and disappeared. Miss Pim found it very difficult to grab a tray with one hand, as she could not relinquish the letter bundle; but she accomplished the feat and wandered off to the long gallery of shells and mineralogical specimens, where she sat down to the best breakfast she had enjoyed since leaving home.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE walk back to Potsdam, through the shaded alleys of Sans-Souci, was delightful. On her way to the Palast Hotel she saw a shop where large brown canvas bags were hanging by leather straps. Before the war these bags were largely in request, being more portable than basket or trunk.

Miss Pim detached one with difficulty and carried it off to her room at the hotel. In this she stowed all the letters, the silken coverlet which she valued as a trophy, and the contents of her rucksack. At first she tried strapping the canvas package round her waist, but it was awkward and bulky and impeded her movements, so she managed with the straps of the discarded bag to fasten it to her shoulders and carry it, pack-wise, on her back. She did not find it heavy or inconvenient, and if Miss Pim had not been fifty and sober-minded she would have skipped round the room like a kid.

Now, mindful of her promise to the Baron, she fastened the envelopes up against the window panes, and, taking a farewell look round the room, she left her old rucksack as a memento of her unperceived visit, and walked to the Potsdam station.

Once in Berlin, Miss Pim made her way to the Adlon Hotel; the grander the hotel, the more likely she was to secure a room. This time she took a fine suite overlooking the Linden, and in a deep drawer to the handsome wardrobe she bestowed her bundle. Of course, it might be discovered, but Miss Pim felt she must take the risk, which was minimised by lock and key.

During the uncomfortable journey from Potsdam in the luggage van, Miss Pim had thought out her day in Berlin. Keutsick must be warned. At the number in Merckel-strasse she might find him, or some one who could be trusted to convey a message to him, and if revolutionary friends were indisposed to put themselves out, Miss Pim must journey to warn him, wherever he might be. The day was still too young, she thought, for a visit to the nest of desperadoes.

Miss Pim had a melodramatic picture in her mind of revolutionaries sleeping all day, in underground bunks, and by night, armed to the teeth, seated at a rough table, plotting by the light of guttering candles stuck in bottles.

So Miss Pim spent a dreary day, examining monuments of warrior kings or wandering through museums. She began with the National Gallery, where she saw, without observing, some eleven hundred oil paintings and thirty thousand water-colours. She next

attempted the Emperor Frederick Museum, but rejoiced to find it closed. At Ravéné's Picture Gallery, less fortunate, she gained admission and viewed a collection of old Berlin Masters, each picture more frightful than the last. The Museum of Industrial Art fairly finished Miss Pim and drove her to the Restaurant Royal on the Linden, where she picked up the best meal she could get, but it came to her very forcibly that Germany was experiencing a most alarming food-shortage. The private gourmandising she heard Germans complain of Miss Pim did not believe in; there was no sign of it anywhere. Sausages could still be bought, but no English person could trust himself to touch that most doubtful composition; even the smoked and preserved fish had gone beyond the power of smoke and salt to preserve. Miss Pim was sick of Berlin. She sat with a cup of coffee at the Café Royal, and watched the passers-by till the hot sun disappeared, leaving a hot twilight. Miss Pim had not a notion where to look for Merckelstrasse, a mean street leading down to the Spree. As the Spree meanders all over Berlin, it would be very difficult to find; the only thing was to walk to some poor quarter near the river and enquire from children. Even this method failed; she was frequently misdirected and as often disappointed. Up and down streets of lofty houses, awful tenement buildings

teeming with women and children back from munition works, Miss Pim trudged along, looking a very woe-begone person in bedraggled mourning; her feet were so tired she felt as though her boots were soled with lead. Bitterly she regretted the miles of museum floor she had paced. An aged German Jew, wearing a kind of caftan and an exceedingly dirty smoking-cap, bowed to her deeply as she passed and begged the "Gnädige Frau" to honour his poor dwelling, where possibly some of his antiquities might tempt her. Miss Pim decided to honour him; it would be well worth her while to pay some marks for the chance of resting a little while. The black underground cellar was crowded with rusty fenders, worn-out old stoves, lame tables, and all the refuse of decayed tenements which had withstood the disintegration of years. Miss Pim sank down on a wooden stool polished by generations of Germans; possibly Goethe's grandmother's cook had sat on that very stool.

"I am afraid you have nothing here which could possibly tempt me," sighed Miss Pim, looking round. "The fact is, I am looking for a street, a very poor street, leading to the Spree, and no one can direct me."

"I have lived in Berlin close on eighty years; maybe I could direct you, but if you will come into my back

shop first, I will show you something more tempting than this rubbish," he said. And, lifting back some old clothes hanging on the wall, he stooped and led the way through a black hole; striking a light, he held up a candle, and Miss Pim found herself in a small room lined with very old, very bad oil paintings.

"Here you see a collection of priceless old masters," said the aged Jew, his eyes glistening; "but if they do not tempt you, I have treasures, more portable, more valuable, and more easily concealed." And, groping inside his caftan, he brought out a leather bag, and poured into his hand a little heap of diamonds; the majority were small, but there was a fair number of large-sized diamonds, which glittered in the Jew's black hand like fragments of stars.

"Take your choice, Fräulein; they are of a fine water — priceless gems."

Miss Pim turned away. "I am very sorry, but I cannot buy diamonds. I am travelling and return to my home in Switzerland in a few days. I could not buy diamonds, even if I wished to do so, because I have not enough money."

"But these I would sell you at a quarter of their value, O most greatly honoured lady. You would make money on them in Switzerland, four times over what you paid."

Miss Pim was firm, and stooped to go out through the low doorway. The old man swept the precious stones back into the leather bag and begged Miss Pim to select a small Raphael or a sketch by Rubens, but Miss Pim instinctively objected to being hustled into making purchases.

Once again in the dismal shop, the Jew resumed his mournful, deprecating air; perhaps the lady would return on the morrow and view his art treasures by a better light?

Miss Pim, now longing to be gone, as the dusk had deepened into night and poor streets are ill-lighted, assured the old man that she might return with a friend who collected pictures, — could he tell her where Merckel-strasse was?

Merckel-strasse, leading down to the Spree? Why, yes! He knew it very well, but it had an evil name, and it was hardly a safe place to visit at night.

Miss Pim insisted that she must go there and if he would accompany her so far, she would give him a mark. The old man's eyes shone and he readily consented; the street was not more than a quarter of an hour's walk, he said, but it would be hard to describe the turnings.

CHAPTER XXIV

CERTAINLY Miss Pim could not have found Merckelstrasse without a guide. When he stopped at the entrance of a narrow street, appearing the narrower for the loftiness of the buildings, Miss Pim thanked the old Jew and put the mark in his hand. He took the money and disappeared instantly. As there was nothing more to be got, he felt no more interest in Miss Pim; he had no curiosity about anything which did not pay.

Miss Pim could see no numbers; open doors showed steep flights going up, or steps leading down into dark pits; the street was perfectly quiet, and — what was rather alarming to Miss Pim — there was no one in sight — to find yourself alone in a foreign street, with an evil name on a dark night, is decidedly unnerving. Miss Pim tried to reassure herself; this was exactly where she wished to be, and surely it was better to find herself in a quiet street than in a place crowded by rowdy characters. She walked along steadily till she heard the *flop*, *flop*, of water, and knew she had reached the end of the street. She crossed over and walked back on the other side; the *tap*, *tap* of her footsteps echoed, so that she repeat-

edly turned, thinking herself followed. When she reached the entrance of Merckel-strasse, Miss Pim felt a strong desire to fly, anywhere, away from this street with an evil name. Might not some one be following her at that very moment, crouching in the shadows, ready to leap out and stab — her body could so easily be dropped in the sluggish river!

"Once more I will walk to the Spree, and back," said Miss Pim, "and if I see no one to ask, I will give it up. I cannot, I dare not enter one of those awful houses to enquire."

She had gone halfway down Merckel-strasse when a man came out of a house and walked straight up to her. Seizing her by the arm, he swung her round and said: "I have been watching you; now, clear out of this street and never dare to show yourself here again. You have been walking up and down some time; we have a short way with spies."

Miss Pim's nervousness quite disappeared.

"I am so glad to see some one," she said quite simply. "I was so afraid that after finding Merckel-strasse with great difficulty, I should have to give it up! I mean, give up finding number eight. I dared not enquire, and German houses are so oddly numbered."

"What do you want at number eight?" asked the man suspiciously.

Miss Pim thought of mentioning Keutsick's name but hesitated lest she be giving him away. The man saw her hesitate. "You clear out! No more talk! Clear out of this street."

"I hesitated only because it is dangerous to trust anybody these days," she answered. "I came here because I was told by a friend that I should find safety at number eight."

"How runs the song?" asked the man carelessly, looking towards the Spree, and pretending to be perfectly indifferent.

"The flaming Dawn is breaking,
How many have died to see!"

said Miss Pim, looking the other way, and unsuccessfully trying to appear indifferent.

The man veered round.

"How terribly imprudent you are then, hanging about in this way — quick — follow me!" And grabbing Perdita Pim by the sleeve, he ran her into a house, tore up three steep flights of stone stairs, and hauled her into a large neat room, — a typical German room of the well-to-do lower class, with solid, highly polished furniture, polished painted floor, dull varnished wall-paper, clean muslin curtains — a Puritan's parlour.

Miss Pim, breathless, shaking in every limb, sank down on a hard, stiff-backed chair.

"You are safe here, for a time," said the man gravely.

"But I am not here on my own account," said Miss Pim in a low voice.

The man turned on her menacingly. "You said that you sought safety."

"I ought to have said the safety of a friend. I have discovered a plot to kill Professor Keutsick. I know every detail of the plot, and I came here to-night to warn him. He it was who told me of this sanctuary in case of danger, so I hoped either to find him here, or else to get some friend of his to convey to him a warning of his imminent danger."

The German looked at her fixedly, still doubting.

"Oh! I know you think I am sent here to discover his whereabouts to betray him to the police. How can I convince you that I am Keutsick's friend?"

"Who is Keutsick's friend?" said a mocking voice. And Miss Pim's heart really leapt when she saw him standing in the doorway leading from an inner room.

"Miss Barton!" he cried, striding towards her, dragging his leg. "Oh, we'll take care of you, and smuggle you out of the country in safety. My goodness, you should thank Himmel and Keutsick that you got here."

"But she has not come here for herself; it is to warn you, Johann," said the German affectionately, putting his hand on Keutsick's shoulder.

"Is that so?" said Keutsick, grinning, and looking at her with his restless, melancholy eyes. "Then there is nothing urgent, nothing to bother ourselves about. Tell Katti we have a lady guest, and see here, Hartburg, get us something extra for supper." Turning to Miss Pim, "We are growing greedier and greedier every day. I am sure all Berlin dreams at night of succulent dishes, and peace to most of us means a full belly."

"Now, sit down on the least uncomfortable chair, which is this one." And Keutsick pulled out a very stiff-backed armchair. "You can see how high our principles are by the order, cleanliness, and — discomfort all around."

"Herr Keutsick —," began Miss Pim.

"Now, you have to call me Keutsick, 'tout court,' or Brother Keutsick, as they do in Socialist circles. How do you like me for a brother? Shall I call you Sister Jane?"

"Keutsick," said Miss Pim, "I am troubled and anxious on your account. Now, do sit down quietly and listen to me. I have heard, as an absolutely certain and settled thing, that you are to be arrested, the day after to-morrow at a big revolutionary meeting. You are then to have a week's training or so at the machine-gun, and be sent to the western front, put in the foremost line of trenches, chained to your gun — and — in that way—"

"They will get rid of me. I have always made as much noise as I possibly could, and it is n't altogether an inappropriate end, to be blown up, in a deafening roar of guns."

"But you *will* defeat this plot," pleaded Miss Pim. "You know that you are of more use —"

"Alive than dead. Just so," said Keutsick with a whimsical smile. "Still, I might be useful as 'Saint' Keutsick wearing the aureole of saints and martyrs. You know Socialists have a remarkable calendar of saints. That meeting you allude to is in commemoration of La Salle, though in confidence I may assure you that he was much more interesting dead than alive!"

"Keutsick, do let us talk seriously," said Miss Pim very earnestly. "Promise me that you will not go to this meeting. Indeed, I want you to do more; I want you to leave Germany. I will help you to escape — I have maps, compasses, I can always obtain food and shelter. You can hide in woods and outhouses and we could walk at night. It is easier than you think, and then you shall come to England. I can explain your presence, and make it safe for you, or, if you prefer it, you can go to Sweden and work out your ideas there. There need be no difficulty about money, *Brother* Keutsick."

He sat looking at her with a very kindly smile.

"How nicely you arrange it all — like a very kind, very silly little girl; but you lack intuition, that's certain. So you *really* think I would leave my country and my people at such a crisis? You think I do not love Germany? That I am not German through and through? And you picture me living by police permission in England, or else making futile speeches at Stockholm!"

Miss Pim looked crestfallen.

"There, there, — you meant it all kindly and — beautifully, and I am ungrateful to resent the proposal; no, I do not resent it, I just set it aside. You see, unfortunately, I resemble the All Highest in one respect; we both have a withered limb, but I have not,

like him, a withered soul. I would much prefer being chained to a machine gun to escaping, say, to England or Sweden. But by warning me about this plot to kill me you have done me a great service. I am not at all anxious to have my career cut short, just when dawn, maybe, is breaking. I am convinced that the old order of things is passing. I am so certain of this that I think meetings and speeches are hardly necessary; when the saucepan is on a roaring fire, it is hardly necessary to add a lighted match, the boiling over is sure to come. I do not as a rule care much for paradox, but what I am about to say, though it appears paradoxical, is really a great *truth*.

"Now, Miss Barton, listen to the words of a staunch German: our only chance of victory lies in *defeat* — complete, and not partial defeat — just as surely as the only chance of the Allies is in complete and not partial victory. We must lose to win.

'The flaming Dawn is breaking,
How many have died to see!'

No German boy has died in vain, if only we are beaten; Germany must lose her body to save her soul.

"War is damnable, but who knows? The All Highest by some awful irony is destined to liberate Germany from Kaiserdom. If the Allies falter or fail,

we are lost; shades of the prison-house envelop us once more.

"The Allies must not meet German emissaries of the Kaiser, masquerading as Labour or Socialists; they only seek to deceive, and to win by fraud what they cannot win by force of arms.

"I am convinced that the uplifting of Germany can only come after her downthrow. I do not, therefore, look on the Allies as enemies; you are, in reality, our allies. My prayer to England and France would be — 'Do not fail us.'

"The rot in Russia is the work of German imperialism; let that be a warning to fools and visionaries in the West. Bismarck liberated France; France will liberate Germany.

"Tell them this in England. As for me — for my fate — it is exceedingly unimportant. Of course, I hope to see the new birthday of Germany, and though I shall not be able to dance, I shall hop with the merriest, and drink good Rhine wine to celebrate the arrival of 'Der Tag.'

"And now, my sister, how about yourself? I cannot in the least understand how you come to be walking about free in Berlin! You are a very wonderful woman, and even a very mysterious woman. Oh! by the way, you will excuse my asking," said the monkey-faced one, his eyes dancing with fun. "But

after we parted at Cologne, did you, by any chance, marry a German? And since, become widowed? I ask because of this." And he lifted up Miss Pim's long crêpe veil.

Perdita blushed. "I did it — for safety, to look more German."

"Alas! You wear the livery of Europe to-day," sighed Keutsick. "But here come Katti and Hartburg with refreshment. You will not mind supping with us, and then Hartburg will accompany you to your hotel; by the way, where are you hiding yourself?"

When Miss Pim told him she was staying at the Adlon he gave a low whistle.

"The Adlon — well — perhaps the greatest daring means the greatest wisdom; the police won't be looking for you there — Still, I don't understand how you registered, how you got the permit, and without a passport! But here's the evening meal; questions can wait."

Miss Pim sat down at the polished table between Keutsick and Hartburg. Katti, a calm, solemn German woman dressed in black, waited upon them. The meal consisted of sardines, one egg for Miss Pim, and some very nice Hamburg rusks, fine black grapes, and three ripe figs. The wine, amber-coloured, was very fine and sweet enough to please Miss Pim. Keutsick skilfully filled her glass whenever she turned

to talk to Hartburg: whether it was the wine, or the kindness and sympathy, Miss Pim warmed and expanded, and ended by telling that which she had meant not to tell.

"I spent yesterday at Potsdam," she began. And as this in no way surprised her audience, she added: "Ah, but you will never guess where I slept and whom I saw!"

"Give it up," said Keutsick, slipping a fig on to her plate.

"I saw the Kaiser, and I slept at the New Palace, and — and I breakfasted there!"

Keutsick dropped the bunch of grapes, and Hartburg violently pushed back his chair.

"You did not," said Hartburg roughly.

"How did you?" said Keutsick gently.

"I got into the palace at dark — I slipped in, and hid myself. I evaded the guards."

Hartburg was going to speak, but Keutsick stayed him with uplifted hand.

"I got into the Kaiser's room, unseen. He was talking to a big heavy man he called Anton."

"Yes, yes," cried Hartburg, wildly excited. "Yes, that's Count Anton von Orthmann."

"Hush! Let Miss Barton speak, uninterrupted," said Keutsick.

"The Kaiser was in bed, very dolorous about his

feelings, and his dislike of going to the front, because he hated seeing dead or suffering men; he spoke with dread of the cold on the Russian front. He pitied himself a lot."

"He *would!*" interjected Hartburg.

"He also complained bitterly that Michaelis was thrust upon him as Chancellor by the Crown Prince; he had just had a violent scene with the Crown Prince, and this Anton soothed him like an old nurse. After a while the Count — what do you call him? — Orthmann asked the Kaiser to spare the life of an English girl, condemned to death at Liège for helping her lover to escape. She was to be shot this morning, and the stout man called Anton had motored over to try and get a reprieve. But because the girl was English, the Kaiser would not hear of it; he became so furious that the man left. And then I came out, and told the Kaiser he was a wicked devil, and I fired off a pistol at him, a pistol I had taken from an officer. I pulled the trigger six times, but all in vain; it was not loaded. I had never thought of examining the pistol."

"How splendid of you!" cried Hartburg; "and what a pity you failed!"

"How utterly foolish of you!" said Keutsick, "and how fortunate that you failed! No; we don't want the Kaiser to slip out of his difficulties, the results of

his crimes and mistakes, in that way; it is in the Great Plan of things that he should suffer and pay.

"With the Crown Prince as Kaiser things would be just as bad. But even if he were an improvement on his father, it is not the individuals we have to pick off, it is the whole system we have to uproot. So allow me to congratulate you on failing to — execute the All Highest."

"I believe you are right," said Miss Pim. "I acted on impulse, thinking I would rid the world of a monster of cruelty. When I heard him refuse so brutally to reprieve that poor girl, I could not contain myself."

"Oh, I understand your feeling, and share your indignation; but tell me, how did you escape?"

"I rushed out by a farther room, dodged along corridors, and hid myself in one of many unoccupied apartments."

"A very surprising adventure. So you were the guest of the All Highest, after all! Does this end your ambitious programme?"

"It is time I returned to England," replied Miss Pim, "though I should like to see Hindenburg."

"I suppose you want him to sign an autograph-book?" said Keutsick, with a smile.

"You are pleased to be sarcastic," said Miss Pim, rather embarrassed.

"Hindenburg, I can assure you, is not an agreeable person to meet. But you are hardly likely to do so; he is now on his way to Flanders, and will probably visit headquarters near Turcoing, and you, of course, will try and escape by Holland. But I cannot, for the life of me, see how you will do it. You came here, at great risk to yourself, to warn me; I wish I could make some return and save you. If you could lie hidden, I might work out a plan; I have friends —"

"But I have plans of my own which will safeguard me, so you need not be troubled about me in the least," said Miss Pim earnestly. "I wish I could let you know when I am safe home again."

"You might advertise in your 'Times' newspaper, at a definite date, say, this day month, and on three consecutive days; English newspapers are obtainable here, you know."

"And now, we must part," said Miss Pim, rising. "Do you know, Keutsick, it has made a great difference to me — meeting you; you have shown me a glimpse of a chastened, purified Germany, where I saw nothing but a welter of savagery and treachery. I believe in *your* 'Tag.'"

"But remember, our defeat is the condition," replied Keutsick. "Germany cannot conquer herself, she must be conquered. We can only rise, reborn, from the flaming pyre. The phœnix could not nestle

peaceably, the fiery furnace was her cradle. Hartburg, you will see Miss Barton to the Linden — and now make sure the coast is clear."

Hartburg went ahead, and Perdita Pim followed slowly with Keutsick.

On the second floor he paused under a gas jet. "We must wait here a moment," he said.

Miss Pim suddenly felt a strange pang — a premonition that Keutsick would soon behold his great day, but not on this earth.

"I — I *shall* see you again?" she murmured.

He answered her thought. "How curious it is, you all seem to think dying the most dreadful thing, and the end of everything! To me it is beautiful and to be — deserved; and the best kiss is that 'tender, desired, last embrace of our great Mother, the Earth.'"

"Merckel-strasse is quite clear," said Hartburg, panting up the steps.

As she descended, Miss Pim looked back at Keutsick, and she saw that his face had become beautiful.

CHAPTER XXVI

Miss Pim's journey to Flanders was so trying that she could never think of it without a shudder. From Berlin to Cologne, it took over twenty hours. She dared not get a ticket and go as an ordinary passenger. She stood for many hours in a corridor, but at Stendal she crawled into a luggage-van, where she lay on a crate, in darkness and stifling heat, afraid to sleep had sleep been possible. Indeed, she became afraid of unconsciousness descending on her, and her fear was mainly on account of her precious rucksack, for if visibility returned to her, unawares, all her belongings might be torn from her before she could disappear.

At Cologne she went straight to a hotel near the station, and found an unoccupied room, where she was fortunate enough to sleep undisturbed. The next day she travelled more easily to Aachen, but suffered great discomfort on her journey to Brussels. She was too bruised and exhausted to take the interest she otherwise would have in this greatly tried capital of unhappy Belgium. She rested there quietly till she felt sufficient energy to get to Courtrai, where she was told the Headquarters of the German Army of the

Northwest was established under General Sixt von Arnim. At Brussels she heard of a Prince Chemnitz, belonging to the Staff; he occupied the fine house of a Belgian banker near Courtrai, and was married to a very beautiful American, Miss Sadie Bung, who had an immense fortune. Perdita Pim was so tired of hotels, where she heard nothing of any value, that she determined to stay, uninvited, at the house of Princess Chemnitz.

Arrived at Courtrai, she went first to a hotel, where, according to her custom, she commandeered the best room, and, locking herself in, she carefully looked round, pulled down the blinds, and dragged a table to the wardrobe; cautiously mounting the table, holding her canvas bundle, she tumbled it on to the top of the wardrobe, where it lay in a hollow, quite out of sight.

In the town of Courtrai, Miss Pim, after making a few needful purchases, asked the address of Prince and Princess Chemnitz. Half an hour's walk beyond the tramway, in a pretty park, with a much-neglected flower garden, stood a so-called château, rather in the style of a showy villa. Miss Pim, now invisible, of course, searched high and low for a room, and decided to wait till night, when she could alight on any unoccupied room. The Princess was out, but a beautiful little boy of two and a half, the only child

of the Prince and Princess, gave her a great fright. She was standing in the room, where he was playing with his German nurse. Miss Pim was admiring his golden curls and exquisite colouring when the child looked up at her, smiled, and held out his arms. As Miss Pim drew back, much alarmed, the little fellow toddled across the room to her. She knelt down and kissed him gently, but she was very careful to keep away from him lest by touching her he, too, should disappear. Miss Pim realised that, though invisible to herself and others, she was visible to the little child. This might prove very awkward, since the child wanted to come to her; might he not, by his insistance, somehow betray her presence? She managed to make her escape, and wandered down to the rather gaudy salon, opening on to a large conservatory.

Miss Pim sat in a corner of the room, and, as she put it to herself, awaited developments. These quickly came, in the persons of the Prince and his American wife — the most lovely creature Miss Pim had ever set eyes on, tall, fair, faultless in feature and figure, but restless in thought and movement. She threw herself on a sofa, then jumped up and sat on the arm of the couch, swinging her feet; then she walked up and down the room, her husband, a tall, handsome young German in uniform, watching her with adoring eyes.

"You say I should invite Von Hindenburg to stay here," she said, pouting, "and his shadow, his spokesman, Ludendorf; that it is a great honour for us. Well, Otto, I don't count it an honour at all. Oh! I know *krieg* is *krieg*, and I must meet and entertain horrid officers and their still horrider wives, but — I think, when my own countrymen are out to kill Germans, I ought to be spared meeting Germans, and I ought not to be asked to receive them under my own roof."

"But, Sadie, my angel, you are a German now," said Prince Chemnitz plaintively.

"I — a German! No, sir-ree, I'm no German, and I guess Otto Bung Chemnitz, junior, is no German either. I want to get back with him to Montana, where you can join us after the war, and raise sheep or cattle. You said yourself that after this war, Germany would be an impossible country to live in. You may bet your bottom dollar that after this war — I get — Otto, dear old boy, don't ask me to invite Von Hindenburg here; you say he is coming this afternoon, to talk over plans with you. Why should I see him at all? He despises women."

"On the contrary, he is a good husband and father; his daughters are charming."

"What a pity you did not marry one of them! Otto!" And the pretty creature came behind her husband's chair and put her arms round his neck.

"Let us — escape to Holland, and then you could join our boys at the front and fight on the other side. Oh, it has turned out so dreadful being a German, if I really am a German; I don't believe a real downright American could ever feel German, not since the Americans came into the war. Why, every bit of Germanness fell from me the day the Lusitania was — was sunk."

"Sadie, your talk is terrible. I tremble lest any one hear you, and report you to Headquarters. My mother wants me to shut you up in the Schwartz Greiz Schloss; she says you will bring disgrace and ruin on the family, and she wishes to educate Ottolin herself."

"She shall never, never have my boy. My boy is myself, and I guess no living being, no Hun hag, no Boche witch, is going to take *him* from me."

"Are you speaking of my honoured mother?" said Prince Chemnitz, rising and turning pale.

"No words are too strong for any one who would dare to attempt — I say attempt — to separate an American woman from her child." The Princess stood up facing him, her eyes blazing, her cheeks aflame, and her golden hair, loosened by her passionate movements, hanging low on her white neck.

Fortunately the scene was cut short by the arrival of Master Otto. His mother snatched him from his

nurse and kissed him so violently that he set up a howl; then, catching sight of Miss Pim, he put out his arms to her, crying, "Schöne Dame, schöne Dame."

"What does he mean?" said his mother, putting him down.

He straightway crawled to Miss Pim, who edged away; round the room he followed her, crying "pretty lady" at intervals.

His father picked him up, and, pointing to the Princess, said in German, "*There* is the pretty lady." But Master Otto was as determined as his mother; he took his finger out of his mouth and pointed to Miss Pim by the door. As she slipped out, she heard him say with assurance, "Pretty lady gone."

Von Hindenburg was to be there that very afternoon! Miss Pim's heart beat quite jumpily at the prospect of the meeting. She would be present at that important council — what might she not learn there!

Unseen, she joined the family at lunch, taking what she required and sitting in a corner of the dining-room, her plate on her lap. At first it was very disconcerting when the princeling kept on nodding at her, and pointing with his spoon in her direction, but, after staring round, no one took any notice of the child's vagaries.

Lunch was rather gloomy, but conversation was kept up for appearance' sake. When the servants had left and Master Otto had been carried off, the Prince and his wife sat together over coffee and cigarettes.

"I suppose you will be hours and hours at this old pow-wow," said Sadie Chemnitz, blowing up little curls of smoke.

"It is awfully important," said the Prince gravely. "Von Hindenburg is to settle the line of retreat."

"According to plan?" said his wife, looking quite innocent. "Yes," said the Prince; "I need n't tell you that the outlook is really hopeless."

"So Von Hindenburg has come just to try his hand at prolonging the agony?" said his wife, trying to blow smoke rings.

"There is no way of shortening it," said the Prince simply.

"Excepting by surrender," she retorted.

"Do you see Germans surrendering?" he replied angrily.

"Oh! I guess Germans will have to do exactly the same as any other conquered people. When they are beaten, they will give in. You are always saying war is war; I now say defeat is defeat."

The Prince looked sulky; then, rising, he said: "Ah, well, since this is the biggest room in this beastly little hole, we shall have the conference here, so we had

better give instructions accordingly. I must see to the wine and cigars."

The Princess then moved into the salon adjacent. Miss Pim followed, and enjoyed listening to her hostess singing "coon" songs in a low voice.

This sweet, undisciplined American attracted her; it was a delight to look on such loveliness, such freshness; in her company the cruelty and horror of this German-made war could be forgotten for a little space.

Suddenly the Princess ran to the door and peeped out. Harsh gutturals and clinking of spurs could be heard. Miss Pim, in a fever to get out, had to wait whilst the Princess watched, holding the door, but prolonged patience becomes wild impatience. Miss Pim wrenched the door open and rushed out, entering the council room as the officers were settling themselves round the table.

Miss Pim stared. Was it possible! Could that man be Von Hindenburg, the Commander-in-Chief; the man who held in his hands the destinies of Germany? Miss Pim looked and looked, and a gasp of relief, with something like a sob of grief and fear, almost choked her.

He looked so horrible and deadly, and yet at the same time so inadequate. She compared Sir Hugh Douglas, Sir Hector Russell, Sir Robert Williamson,

Pétain, Cadorna, Pershing, with this — big German brute. His face had such an awful fascination for her that she could not move her eyes away.

Miss Pim felt that he was brutal, forceful, contemptuous, and vain. His eyes, small and observant, had puffed under-lids; his square face was fleshy and warty, but his mouth, his small mouth, gave him away; it was like the mouth of some dreadful flatfish of the depths — utterly cruel. Hindenburg repelled because he looked inhuman; he seemed to Miss Pim the very Spirit of Evil, made Man. His uniform was much creased by his stout body, folds being ruckled up from under the arms round to the front. He sat, absent-minded, staring about, whilst Ludendorf talked, a typical German officer, well set up, and having the military style of good looks common to many.

Ludendorf constantly turned to Von Hindenburg, as though he sought his agreement or his approval, but Hindenburg sat impassive, though occasionally he frowned, his nostrils distended, and he looked about suspiciously, like an animal nosing danger. Miss Pim began to have a very uneasy feeling. Now and then his small animal eyes seemed to rest on her, and she positively trembled, but this feeling passed when Ludendorf produced maps and began explaining Hindenburg's plan.

"The English here, at this point, are convinced

that we shall hold this line, and that possibly we shall withdraw in this direction," said Ludendorf, running his finger along a line on the map, spread out on the table. The officers all came round and stared at the map, but Hindenburg took no notice whatever.

"Pardon me," said a grey-haired Colonel in spectacles, "but the enemy surely will be right; we *must* hold this line."

Hindenburg beckoned to Prince Chemnitz and whispered something; the Prince nodded and went out, and Hindenburg resumed his utter impassivity.

"If we abandon this position," continued the Colonel, "we give up a most important point; we lose the support of this line of railways; to me it looks like — like running away; it would be too terrible. Surely, surely the Commander-in-Chief is not seriously contemplating such a course." And he looked at Hindenburg, who sat swinging his foot, and looking, as it seemed, straight at Miss Pim.

There was a strained silence, broken by the return of the Prince, carrying bottles. He put a quart tumbler before Hindenburg, who laughed heartily and made some joke to the Prince; the glass was then half filled with beer, the General measuring off the amount with his finger; to this was added champagne till the foam ran over the side; and then Hindenburg drank without breathing. Every one waited. When

he had replaced the empty tumbler, with a wicked, half-veiled smile he resumed his attitude of an indifferent spectator.

"If we fall back," cried an eager young officer, "what becomes of these divisions?" And he pointed to another portion of the map.

Miss Pim longed to come round and look at the map they were all so eagerly examining. Then she saw Hindenburg draw up to the table, take a sheet of paper, and commence drawing lines, with a remarkably steady hand. Miss Pim cautiously moved round the table, and coming behind Hindenburg, attentively watched him. When she moved, Hindenburg again threw back his head, like a buffalo sensing danger.

Hindenburg then drew the line of the Rhine, and, writing the names of French and Belgian towns, he drew double lines of trenches and isolated forts marked by crosses, and wrote dates on them. He also indicated divisions by squares, with their numbers; then threw down the plan, saying with finality: "It is all there, just as Ludendorf tells you, just as you can see it on the map. Yes, we are to abandon those lines. I am glad Colonel Winckler thinks it impossible, because that is what I want the British to think. If we hold the line we are — finished; it is as clear as — as noonday. Oh, not at once, but Ludendorf will

by and by explain why; we are crumbling, gentlemen; we must become mobile, we must facilitate the retreat of our guns and men in Belgium. I mark here where we shall echelon our forces. This plan is the *only* plan, and it is for the conservation of energy; its value depends on secrecy and celerity." The sheet of paper passed from hand to hand. Hindenburg now pointed out his ideas on the map. Then, leaning back, he turned to Chemnitz and nodded at his glass, which was again filled.

"Ludendorf will now develop the idea we have."

The officers sat down again. Miss Pim was left standing, alone, at the table near Hindenburg. She saw the map and the plan, there, almost under her hand, but a numbing fear held her back; her heart beat like a winged thing, caged behind her ribs. She could not follow what Ludendorf said, she could only struggle against a strange inhibitory feeling, as though "you shall not!" met "you must!" in her brain. She turned her head away from the maps, and met Hindenburg's deadly eyes. Had those drinks made him a seer by any chance? She could feel the heat radiating from his big body, and still she shivered.

Suddenly he jumped up, shouting like a bull, like a minotaur: "There is some one here in the room — a spy! I feel it! Hold the door! Search!"

Winckler walked to the door, the others gazed at Hindenburg, who turned about, putting out his arms, groping for some one, as in Blindman's Buff.

Miss Pim made a tremendous effort at self-control. Moving out of reach of Hindenburg, she took up the map, folded it roughly and stuck it in her belt; the small plan she rolled up into a ball in her nervousness, and ran it into her bodice with trembling fingers.

Hindenburg kept on bellowing: "There is some one here; feel round for him, you'll get him, do as I do, feel round."

The officers, shocked at what they considered Hindenburg's drunken fit, drew together at the window, even Colonel Winckler left the door. Ludendorf went up soothingly to Hindenburg, whose face and throat positively swelled and pulsated with excitement. Miss Pim tried to dart past him to the door, but he shot out his hand and caught her by the throat. She gave the agonised squeal of a hare caught by dogs, and to the horror of herself and every one present she reappeared. Even her captor relaxed his hold from amazement, and Miss Pim darted to the door, and shot down the corridors into the drawing-room.

"Save me! Hide me!" she cried to Princess Chemnitz, who, with extraordinary presence of mind, pushed her behind the sofa where she was sitting, and

going to the piano she began singing softly: "Oh! dem golden slippers."

The officers, in full cry after Miss Pim, had been diverted for a few seconds by an open door, leading into the Princess's boudoir. Satisfied that she was not there, they now came full tilt into the salon.

The Princess looked round archly and said: "Is the meeting over, gentlemen?"

"Have you seen a woman, a spy, rush in here," cried her husband.

"A spy! How exciting," cried Princess Sadie, clasping her hands. "She would not come *here*, surely."

The Prince looked at her suspiciously — noting her pallor.

"Yes, here she is, right enough," cried Ludendorf, dragging Miss Pim up by the arm. The Germans crowded round her. Hindenburg, now quite calm, his evil little eyes exultant, stood looking at her.

"The Englishwoman is caught, and if I mistake not, she has our map in her belt."

Ludendorf snatched it with an exclamation of horror.

Hindenburg, with an affectation of indifference, said: "I felt some one was there, in that room, all the time! However, no harm is done; we have the map and the woman. Winckelmann, go outside and bring

in my four men; also the sentinel, and your orderly, Chemnitz. Then take her out and shoot her."

"And now, Princess," said Hindenburg truculently, "how comes it you are concealing an English, or maybe an American, spy in the house of a German Staff officer?"

Prince Chemnitz walked up and stood beside his wife. "General, I will undertake to swear that my wife knows no more about this woman than you do yourself. Sadie, speak, tell General Hindenburg that you know nothing about her."

"I never saw the woman before, and she is very likely a German," said the young Princess, looking defiantly at Hindenburg.

But Hindenburg was not susceptible to female charm, and he had taken enough champagne to excite him. He looked at her with intense hatred.

"You belong to a nation at war with us — a nation of hypocrites and liars. I do not take the word of an American."

Prince Chemnitz, as pale as his beautiful wife, advanced one step nearer to Hindenburg. "Do you dare, General, to insult my wife — to insult me — here — in my own home?"

"It will not be your home any longer, Prince. You will leave to-morrow for Riga. As for your — American wife, she will go, by my orders, to your rocky

Schloss, and consider herself under arrest there, where she will remain till this war ends. You have children?"

The Prince and Princess were silent. General Ludendorf answered for them: "A son, General, a child."

"He will be entrusted to the care of his grandmother, Princess Elizabeth Chemnitz, who will bring him up to be a good German. I know the old lady; she will do her duty."

"You would take my baby from me!" cried the young Princess, — "my own little baby — You shall not! Oh, you butcher, oh, you vile —"

Before she could finish the sentence, the lovely free-born American woman suddenly felt the room spin round, darkness seemed to envelop her, and she collapsed where she stood, into complete unconsciousness.

The tramp of feet made Miss Pim look round — seven German soldiers stood in the doorway.

"Take that woman to the Parade Platz, put her against the Drill Hall, and shoot her dead — at once; and stay, have all the new recruits present; it 's good to blood their young snouts."

Colonel Winckelmann interposed. "Would it not be as well to get some confession, some signed deposition, from the prisoner? Is it not desirable to go

through some formality, however rapid, some formality of a trial?"

"All that can be done after the execution," said Hindenburg savagely. "What a mockery to talk of a trial, or a confession! As for the woman's name — spy is enough. Take her away, and report her death at Headquarters. Now, order my car. You, Chemnitz, had better come round this evening; Colonel Beust will give you your orders and some despatches."

Miss Pim was dragged out and marched along the dusty road to Courtrai; in vain she strove to disappear. Once she stopped, in her agony of mind, thinking that the motion of walking impeded the process of disappearing, but the sharp agony of a bayonet thrust in her left arm obliged her to go on, the warm blood trickling down, and dropping through her fingers.

CHAPTER XXVII

Miss Pim, as she walked to Courtrai, though suffering acutely in body and in mind, felt no anger at her fate. Her life had been the forfeit; she had played and lost; she must now pay.

But she did grieve over the failure to help her country. She had obtained most valuable information which her death made it impossible to pass on. No one would know what had become of her. Sir Hugh Douglas's Staff might guess, but nothing would ever be said; Lesley would only hear that Auntie Purr was missing. Such thoughts alternated with sharp spasms of pain in her arm and an increasing sensation of weakness. Miss Pim tried to brace herself, and to prepare her mind for death. She knew that physical collapse would appear to be abject fear, and yet Miss Pim was surprised to feel no fear. In Hindenburg's clutch she had felt the terror of some small animal in the grip of a monster, but now, walking to Courtrai with these dull, stolid German soldiers, all fear of her impending fate had departed; only the longing remained to die with dignity, as the worthy descendant of the Pims should die — to be English to the end.

Keutsick had thought death gentle and desirable;

he had seen nothing dreadful in dying; but Miss Pim could not bring herself to feel this. She was a happy woman and loved life, but it was up to her to die calmly. So by the time she entered the Parade Platz Miss Pim was able to walk towards a building, which she knew must be the Drill Hall, and standing there to await her fate.

She was kept there some little time, whilst the recruits were being fetched. Three officers came to her, and one offered her a chair. He spoke English, and asked her whether she had anything to say. Miss Pim shook her head, but she begged for a glass of water. The officer sent a soldier for water, and again advised her to die sitting. Miss Pim assured him that she would be able to stand, and begged as a last favour that her eyes be not bandaged nor her hands tied. Then the water came, and, as she drank, new life crept into her veins. It was as though she drank some potent elixir; she handed the mug to the soldier with a smile. Life was good and unending, death was only an episode.

She saw crowds of soldiers marching on to the Platz. "All those men coming to see an Englishwoman die!" she said to the officer who had given her the water. "It is very good of them to turn out thus, to do me honour."

The officer frowned: "You must now stand here,

straight up against this wall," he said. "When I drop this handkerchief, the men will shoot."

Miss Pim saw twenty men advance. The officers moved aside, and Miss Pim faced twenty rifles. "I must die game. I must hold up my head for — England." She straightened herself, and like a flash came to her the thought, "One more try for invisibility." She felt the thrill as she threw back her head; then, seeing the officer drop the handkerchief, she flung herself down, quite flat — invisible!

A volley was fired, and Miss Pim wriggled aside, only standing up when out of range. The scene was indescribable. Short, sharp barks of command, soldiers tearing up at the double, the officers examining the dust where Miss Pim had dragged herself. Men were sent running all over the Parade Platz; soldiers were marched up to surround it. Miss Pim did not attempt to leave; she would pass out with the officers.

When it was clear to them that Miss Pim had really disappeared, they left, walking slowly, in deepest gloom. They knew themselves broken men. Hindenburg might even take their lives in exchange for Miss Pim's; and Miss Pim was free in the streets of Courtrai!

Before repairing to the hotel where she had left all her papers, she visited several pharmacies, hoping to find iodine and bandages to dress her wounded arm,

but she could only obtain a little boracic lint. In a draper's shop, however, she carried off a cambric undergarment, which, torn in strips, made a serviceable bandage. Dressing her aching and inflamed arm as well as she could in the hotel bedroom, she now found that tossing her canvas bundle on to the wardrobe was easier than getting it down, which necessitated the careful balancing of a chair on a table and herself on the chair. With a mutilated arm, this was no easy feat; but Miss Pim with infinite caution succeeded in lowering herself and her precious bundle to the floor. Her one thought was to fly from Courtrai; she had a superstitious dread of meeting Hindenburg again. If by any dreadful accident her visibility again returned at Courtrai, she would be shot at sight; better to sleep in the woods, or in barns, on her way to the British lines. Feeling miserably ill and tearful, Miss Pim slowly made her way out of Courtrai by compass. She had supplied herself with the necessary food from the hotel kitchen.

The straps over her shoulders caused much pain in the wounded arm; outside the town she advanced towards the setting sun, with teeth set. "After all," she asked herself, "what is this to the pain many of our boys are enduring without a murmur?" Then the remembrance of Hindenburg's plan flashed on her brain, that plan screwed up into a ball, which she had

thrust inside her dress. The official map had been taken from her, but this sketch map, — this plan which "might succeed with secrecy and celerity," — she carried it on her. What a treasure to give Sir Hugh Douglas! Here was something of immense importance to the Commander-in-Chief. She must cross over to the British lines as quickly as possible.

Miss Pim stood on a little wooded eminence. Away to the northwest ran the railway, and the sinking sun shone red upon the lines from Courtrai and made them appear two thin streams of blood. She decided to follow those lines until they brought her to some station where she might entrain. Along the track she walked, doggedly determined to keep on till she reached the station of Heule, which was crowded with reserves going to the front.

There she heard of a great battle: men like demented creatures were pouring into Heule; the wounded and the dead were said to be beyond computation, and whole divisions were said to be prisoners. The fresh troops from Courtrai going to the front were in trucks — unending chains of trucks, reaching to the far distance in both directions; carriages were being joined together with a crashing jar; carriages were being uncoupled, train-loads of wounded returning, the troops going out from Courtrai hailing their broken comrades, who replied with groans and curses.

It was a fearful sight, in the pale lights of the station, to see those German faces like the faces of maniacs. The confusion was indescribable, as wild as a *débâcle*, — the shouts and yells of the non-coms herding the men, the roar of human voices, the tangle of convoy teams, the shrieks of the locomotives; and all this while the blue of night was deepening till the armies became merged into dark mobile walls of humanity, losing individuality. Lights swung about, some high up in the air, others tremulously running a few feet from the ground. Miss Pim kept moving with a tide of men, first one way, then another, till she lost all notion of direction; but she kept her face instinctively turned westward, where a livid band of light yet lingered in the sky. At last she saw the men swarming into trucks and vans. One truck was being crammed with officers. All she could do was to climb on to the footboard and cling desperately to an iron post, till they reached Moorseile; then she ran down the line, mounted the cab of the locomotive, and sank down on the coal heap.

The battle had been raging throughout the day, and a counter-attack by the Germans would soon be attempted, for the British had advanced along a front of many miles, capturing strong German positions.

As the train progressed, the rending explosion of guns and mortars made Miss Pim feel that crossing

over to the British lines would be difficult, for all her invisibility.

"What must this day's firing have been, if this is a lull?" she thought, when the engine-driver called over his shoulder to the fireman that the guns of the English devils were quieting down.

The train had now reached its terminus, and Miss Pim was thankful to get out and stretch herself. She had walked the length of the little station when the crash of an explosion sent every one down flat, like Noah's ark figures when you shake the table. The fore part of the train had been wrecked; crowds of soldiers had been saved the trouble of dying on the battlefield; the engine, the driver, and stoker had scattered in the air and come down in fragments; and overhead was the throb of one of the British aeroplanes, winging westward in the light of a waning moon, hastening to report at Headquarters "some damage to a German troop train."

After the wounded and the dead had been removed, the men remaining lay down everywhere, along the platform, the railway embankment, all down the road. Some began eating, others looked to their weapons; many drew off their boots and inspected their blisters. Sergeants marched up and down, shouting orders. As far as Miss Pim could make out they were waiting to be joined by further drafts, and all the

night wounded men were being brought in by the thousand and literally piled into open trucks and sent back to Courtrai and beyond.

It was a terrible sight, made more terrible by the cruel and callous treatment of the wounded, the brutality shown to their own dying men. Miss Pim could only steady her mind by repeating to herself, almost mechanically, over and over again: "I have to finish my job. I must finish my job. None of all this must weaken me for my task. Steady, Perdita; keep your British nerve; do not let yourself fail now, when everything may depend on your carrying a high heart."

She sat near a shed, crowded with men trying to keep dry, for towards dawn a dismal downpour commenced; and, notwithstanding the immense discomfort, she must have been dozing, when a bugle sounded, and the steady tramp of multitudes roused her. Stiff and aching, she sat up, and lo! men were moving rhythmically along, as far as the eye could reach. The march to the front had commenced. Would it be a long march? Where was the front? Could Miss Pim keep up with the men? She asked herself these questions anxiously. Every lorry, every gun-carriage was crowded with officers; there was no chance whatever of a lift along the muddy road; and Miss Pim went forward with the sullen, hungry men, who had no stomach for fighting and hoped they might be

made prisoners. Not a man among them believed in victory. They advanced mechanically because they must. Not only were they under the discipline of years, but also the discipline which came by inheritance. These men believed they were going to their death, but they went, not from love of Fatherland, not for Liberty, not even for German Kultur, but because they *must*. They heeded not the harsh words and humiliating blows of their officers; after all, what were these to the awful voice of the British guns?

Slowly they tramped along in the rain and mud, but even so, the pace appeared too fast for Perdita: the pack on her shoulder felt leaden, her thin cashmere dress trimmed with crêpe soon became saturated and clung to her, impeding her movements. But Miss Pim was not town-bred; long country tramps and latterly hard work in the garden had trained her muscles; this and the strong desire to "win through" sustained her, and enabled her to keep up with the men. When they were halted she took out her rations and forced herself to eat.

Some hours they were kept in a poor village waiting for machine guns, the officers walking up and down, using the most frightful language. Miss Pim longed to reveal herself to some poor French peasants hidden in a quarry. She could have given them words

of hope and comfort, and they could have directed her, but she was now afraid of being unable to resume invisibility; the power had failed her so recently, she dared not risk losing it, just in sight of the goal.

The rain had ceased, and Miss Pim, somewhat rested, decided to venture forward alone; if she entered the battle zone with the soldiers, the chances were she would fall with them. So she left the village and the masses of troops behind her, and followed the long, muddy highway, meeting groups of Germans carrying or supporting wounded comrades. Miss Pim frequently stopped, her senses bewildered by the thunder of guns, the screams of flying shells, the awful explosions, and the terrible concussions of the air. All around her, everywhere, the country seemed to be falling to pieces, and she felt that irresolution, that helplessness, experienced in earthquakes.

At last she reached a barren desolation, without landmark of any kind: men with machine guns crouched in cemented holes or behind shattered walls; and then in one mad instant Miss Pim was banged down upon the ground, and lay there some time, completely stupefied. When she recovered, the noise and concussion was so terrific she felt convinced that it would mean instant death to move. The whole world seemed to be crashing to its dissolution and there was no reason for thinking one spot safer than another,

and yet Miss Pim clung to the little heap of stones behind which she lay, and dared not stir hand or foot, simply because she had, so far, escaped injury there where she crouched.

Gazing at the fearful waste, she tried to imagine herself crossing it. "I am now passing along that bit of upright wall. I pause by that tree-stump." And lo! as she looked, mud and rock shot up, and the tree and the wall had disappeared.

In such an inferno invisibility was no protection; the Fates had gone mad, and were dancing with the Furies. "Man stands for nothing," thought Miss Pim. "This is elemental and everlasting. Time and order have disappeared forever!"

Then suddenly the guns ceased, and the silence was more dreadful than the noise because it meant something new. Miss Pim raised her head, and far away in the formless desert she saw small specks moving forward singly and in groups, leisurely, as it seemed to her.

"Our men!" she gasped. And as they drew nearer she saw the groups straighten into lines with plan and intention, and at the same time out of the earth sprang German soldiers. Some ran forward, with uplifted hands, towards the English; others fled like madmen towards Miss Pim, but were stayed by a rain of fire. And Miss Pim lay on her face and tasted

death, for well she knew, if that barrage advanced everything living would disappear. When she dared to look up again, there were no men running, only a flutter of rags here and there.

After another pause Miss Pim saw in the distance, on her left, English soldiers running and crouching, and again running, till they came to a heap of débris, and disappeared behind the ruins of what had been a church.

And then Miss Pim remembered the great masses of Germans, already forming up to counter-attack. Soon they would be trotting up like packs of wolves, running with short pants and lolling tongues like wild beasts. In a few minutes those daring British boys would be surrounded and obliterated.

She ran, as one runs in dreams, with winged feet. The bursting shells no longer terrified her; she knew that she would reach her countrymen, those splendid fellows who had ventured too far ahead, and were now in an untenable position. Only a few yards more and she would be able to tell them of the great counter-attack in time for their retreat. But even as she ran, she became aware that the German divisions were advancing. She climbed over barricades formed by collapsed buildings, and saw the enemy rolling forward in masses. As she stood there, clear against the sky-line, some sniper's bullet grazed her

at the back of the neck, another bullet sped through her bonnet. She flung herself down; then, crawling and creeping, she reached the roofless little church where she found *her people* hidden, twenty soldiers with two machine guns, which they were fitting up to receive the advancing Germans. A young Second Lieutenant stared at her, and she then realised that her invisibility had gone.

"Good Heavens! a woman — and no escape for her now!" he exclaimed. "We are cornered here; we advanced too far, and then we thought we would take this village of Veelneecht," he explained. "Now, I fancy, it is all U.P. Our Colonel is dying. We could hold the place with small reinforcements, and we want ammunition and grenades."

"But the Germans are on you! See that advancing mass!"

"Oh! they have no guns!" replied the Lieutenant; "we could hold out, if we had sufficient ammunition. Awful hard luck that our people don't know, don't realise we are here. It's too late now to send men back; besides, we need every rifle."

Miss Pim turned, and moved towards a man lying on a pile of soldiers' coats near the altar of the shattered church. She stooped to view his face, and recognised Colonel Murcott. He gazed up at her, too far gone for surprise, which is only a surface feeling.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you have come back! We — we must save — you."

He tried to struggle up, but Miss Pim knelt beside him and made him drink from her flask.

"Colonel, give me your orders; I will take them to our lines."

He shook his head: "Impossible, the Germans — the guns — no one could —"

"But I can become invisible. I will go at once; I will get help."

It is doubtful whether the Colonel heard or understood; he smiled faintly and murmured, "You dear."

Miss Pim hurried back to the young lieutenant. "See here, I am going to fetch help; write me a pencil note quickly."

"What! send a woman — well, not quite."

"Let me try," said Miss Pim earnestly. "If I fail, you can try later. What is your regiment?"

"West Kents," replied the Lieutenant; "but it is not to be heard of. I am in command here, so please go and do what you can for the Colonel."

Miss Pim saw it was useless talking, and she was only in the way. Every moment was precious; the Germans were advancing in solid phalanx. To the west, behind the church, stretched a great grey plain, gleaming at intervals with livid streaks of light and balls of white or black smoke; little bits of masonry

stood up here and there beside heaps of rubble, with the ribs of roofs sticking up. And Miss Pim knew that she must pass through that fire, that there was no way but through that field of death; and she also knew that her power had departed and she must go forward — visible.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At the back of the church, through a great rent where the west window had been, Perdita Pim scrambled out. Tripping over wire, falling over graves, and keeping what shelter she could, she made for the British lines, or, at any rate, in the direction where she thought they would be. But the protection of ruined houses soon ceased and she had now before her that sinister open country, broken up by hideous pools and lakes, the shell craters after the night of rain, and the terrible litter of a battlefield. She thought that she ran, but it was only a jog-trot hastening. As she went she tried to save and regulate her breathing, so that her very thoughts came panting.

"I am here — to do it — to save — those dear, dear Englishmen. It is my job — oh— that I may do it — not die — till I have done it — just to save them! Their faces are so — beautiful — so English."

Deliberate bullets sped past her; some caught her streaming veil, three bullets went through her eddying skirts, bullets whizzed past her head. But in such universal frenzy, when the cry of approaching shells and the crash of their coming seemed to disrupt and churn up the whole country, when the very air

seemed rent in fragments, Miss Pim lost all sense of personal existence; she may have been afraid, but she did not know it. She went on because she had started going; she continued advancing from initial impulse, as a top continues revolving. She passed many quiet men, lying on the wet clay; they had finished their work, they were at rest; but she lived, to help the living. Then it seemed to Miss Pim that she was wandering in chaos: there was no indication of British lines, no goal to make for, nothing but mud and destroyed things; there was no longer any meaning to anything, the shameful treatment of all things, from a strand of barbed wire to human lives took possession of her mind. She felt faith, hope, and that strength which gives you strength, all ebbing away from her; she no longer believed in herself, and nothing was worth trying for. Tears and prayers were mere foolishness, and high endeavour all make-believe. A great weakness and weariness came over her; the compelling inertia of a drug seemed to clog her brain and weight her limbs. She dragged herself towards some upheaved earth, some wreckage of planks. She was so tired, too tired to go on. She was beginning to forget why she was out here in this infamous region. Perhaps if she could get behind those mounds — were they graves? — she might rest and recover her judgment; surely her mind wanted

rest, it was out of control, — why did she hear voices? Clearly she heard voices behind those graves, and there was laughter.

"Is that a blinking German widder taking a constitootional?"

And this idiotic remark brought back sanity to Miss Pim. This was England, and she had done her job, and all was well. A joy, the like of which she had never known, irradiated her, as sunshine let into a shuttered room dispels cold and darkness. She never quite knew how she got over that embankment. She kept on calling out: "I come from Colonel Murcott; I bring a message."

Ready hands outstretched to help her down into the British trenches.

"Right you are, madam, though what you might be doing in this here scrap passes me!" said one of the men.

"I bring a message from the village of Veelneecht; some twenty of our West Kents under Colonel Murcott are holding it; the Colonel is badly wounded; if you send men and ammunition at once they may be saved; they have two machine guns, but want for ammunition."

A Second Lieutenant took the message down and it was telegraphed to the rear. A few minutes later Miss Pim had the satisfaction of knowing that sub-

stantial relief would be sent to Colonel Murcott and his men, but it was not thought likely we should hold the village. It was not desirable to get ahead of the general line, because that is country which we might have to barrage if counter-attacking developed. But no great difficulty was anticipated in getting the men away, as the Germans had been removing their big guns for some time, "according to plan," no doubt. So Miss Pim, now easy in her mind, allowed herself to be conducted to the rear. But she was more exhausted than she knew; the prolonged bodily and mental strain and loss of blood now took effect. In vain she struggled against the overwhelming sense of weakness; she felt herself gradually sinking into an abyss of darkness; she stumbled and fell unconscious at the feet of the dismayed soldier.

When Miss Pim recovered she found herself on a truckle bed in the poor room of peasants, her neck and arm firmly bandaged; an aged Frenchwoman sat knitting by the door. When she saw that Miss Pim wanted to speak, she shook her head and presented her with a cup of some liquid, murmuring, "Le médecin commande." Miss Pim drank obediently, feeling too weak to refuse, and immediately after fell into a deep sleep.

It was the dawn of a new day. From where she lay, Miss Pim could see bands of pink and gold in a

grey sky, and as the shadows of night rolled away, she felt all the pain and exhaustion had passed, leaving a delicious languor. It was difficult to remember where she was, and what had happened, but she was content to drowse, and drift off again into unconsciousness. When she awoke the sun was high, and Miss Pim knew that life was good and she was ready for work.

The old peasant woman was quite agitated when Miss Pim, fully dressed, greeted her cheerfully. The black clothes had been dried and brushed, and Miss Pim had pulled the bonnet into shape again; her precious knapsack was at her side. The only thing she now wanted was the coffee, real coffee, and the bread, almost white, which the Frenchwoman put down before her; that blessed meal — would she ever forget it?

Miss Pim was sunning herself on a bench outside the cottage, watching little French children at play, when a group of young officers came up and congratulated her on her fine adventure.

"We were just in time to save the Colonel," began one of them. "The doctor thinks he has a good chance of recovery, and we arrived in the nick of time to take, or rather hold, the village, thanks to you. We routed the Boches; they simply could not stand our fire. We made quite a good bag of prisoners, too."

"It was awfully lucky for you that you got through in a lull," put in another officer.

"Was that a lull?" exclaimed Miss Pim. "Why! it seemed to me a most fearful battle!"

"Oh! that was nothing; you ought to see a proper fight; though, of course, to a lady, I suppose it was pretty bad."

"Do tell us how you escaped from the Germans," asked a very eager young subaltern.

"Yes, yes, do tell us," chimed in the others eagerly.

Miss Pim smiled at them, but she felt rather embarrassed. "Could you send a telegraphic or telephonic message to the Commander-in-Chief for me?" she asked. "You see, he expects to hear from me; as soon as I reached the British lines I was to send word to him; I have quite special information for him."

"I should rather think you had," they muttered in chorus.

"Does the Chief expect you at a certain date?" interjected one of them.

"Well, he could n't be sure when I would get through, if I ever did," explained Miss Pim, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Have you been in Germany since the war began?" inquired the eager young subaltern.

"No; not so long as that," replied Miss Pim evasively.

"What an adventure! What an experience!" sighed an officer, whose best friend was a war correspondent hungry for "copy."

Miss Pim at last, in self-defence, felt obliged to say: "Sir Hugh Douglas expects me to tell him everything before I talk to others, so you will understand and forgive my being so uncommunicative; I really have no choice."

"Oh, of course, of course; obviously you cannot give away the show till you have seen the Chief," they cried. For all that they were much disappointed. English ladies do not come "at the double" over No Man's Land every day; but they left Miss Pim in peace.

"Do you think," she asked, doubtfully, of the surgeon who came to dress her arm and neck that evening, "that I could nurse Colonel Murcott?"

"Oh! he's at Boulogne by now, and will probably cross over to Blighty this evening. He has all possible care and he may recover, though, of course, he's in rather a bad way," pronounced the surgeon, fastening the bandage.

Miss Pim was much relieved. Nursing had never been her strong point; she felt quite out of her element in the sick-room, being either unduly anxious and depressed or else over-confident, too readily believing the patient was convalescent and only needed

cheering. Of course, if Colonel Murcott had been in the village, she would have done her share of nursing, but she would not greatly have contributed to the Colonel's recovery. Now, however, that he was in skilled hands, Miss Pim felt cheerful and free from responsibility and anxiety on his account.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next morning a very restless Miss Pim strolled about, talking to the soldiers and children. She could not altogether dispel a sense of failure. What had she done with her miraculous power? She had just made a trip into Germany. She had not killed the Kaiser, or Hindenburg; she had done little more than any Swiss or Swedish woman might have done, without invisibility. And now she must face the Commander-in-Chief, tell her inadequate story, and steal back to Froghurst to become once more a vegetable marrow. Lesley was right; Auntie Purr was not capable of high adventure.

The throb of a motor broke upon her sad reverie. The Commander-in-Chief had sent his car for Miss Pim, with a brief note: —

> Congratulations on safe return, I send car to bring you to Headquarters, if you feel well enough for the run.
>
> HUGH DOUGLAS.

Seeing the surgeon enter the cottage, Miss Pim showed him the note. "I must go now, doctor; thank you for your care. Will you explain to the Colonel why I took French leave?"

"But I have not passed you as fit," said the sur-

geon, smiling. "Sir Hugh Douglas expressly says, 'if you are well enough for the run.'"

"No," retorted Miss Pim; "he does not say, 'if you *are* well enough'; but 'if you *feel* well enough'; and I feel quite well enough, thanks to you. You see, he has sent his car; the fresh air and the movement will complete my cure, and do away with this restlessness."

Miss Pim really felt better the moment she was off. She sank down in the seat, amid cushions and rugs provided by some one's forethought, and wished she might journey thus for days and days, instead of a few short hours.

The afternoon was still golden and hazy when the big car swung round a corner, and to Miss Pim's surprise she found herself once more at the door of the Mairie, where not so many days ago she had first met Sir Hugh Douglas and his Staff.

A Lieutenant received her at the door, and at once conducted her to the big Council Chamber overlooking the *place*, where she found Sir Hugh Douglas.

Her welcome was extremely cordial. They all seemed glad and relieved to see her back safe; no one cried: "But what did you succeed in doing?" Miss Pim blushed when Sir Hugh Douglas led her to an armchair and begged her to tell them the full story of her adventures. A shorthand writer sat at a small

table, and Sir Hugh and his Staff took chairs round Miss Pim, and listened with parted lips like eager children as she related her curious experiences.

When she had finished, Sir Hugh Douglas rose abruptly and in a voice from which he could not eliminate altogether a sharp note of excitement said, "That plan of Hindenburg's, — you have it here?" And Miss Pim, trembling, turned out all the papers she had brought from Germany on to a large table. Here was the correspondence of the Kaiser; Sir Hugh Douglas set it aside, saying, "History." Here was the plan of the new submarine, and a list of submarine bases. Sir Hugh put these apart, saying, "Navy." But when he saw the crumpled paper, Hindenburg's own plan, his face shone: "The Army! Now we shall know the German intentions." And he made Miss Pim repeat again and again what Hindenburg had said: how this was, in his opinion, the only course to take; that they would begin at once, cloaking their plan by feigned attacks and the movement of troops in other directions.

"Of course, it seemed possible they might attempt this, but I dismissed it as unlikely, the sacrifice seemed too great for them. Yet I see now that if they could have carried it through, unbeknown to us, it would have been the best thing for them. And now, what a coup for us! How we'll counter them, ap-

pearing to be deceived! Why, this is tremendous, this is worth all the rest. Miss Pim, this paper is priceless; we've *got* them. They forgot this plan, and having taken the map from you, they won't imagine that you can give them away. Besides, Hindenburg, you say, was set on this plan. He is no doubt fixing it all up now. We must start moving the troops to-night. When Miss Pim has left us, we will figure it all out. And you saved Murcott's life, and the lives of those men with him. Miss Pim, I shall recommend you for the Victoria Cross. Really, the value of your work is beyond telling, the results incalculable. The Admiralty will want to thank you. The papers and plans you took from Von Schlange are of great importance to us; they are signed by General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of Von Arnim, and the master-brain of German defence in the West. And these letters from Von Bethmann-Hollweg and Von Jagow doubtless give away the whole German plot. Miss Pim, I never dreamt you would do such wonderful things in Germany."

Miss Pim's eyes were filled with tears; she looked steadily out on the *place*, unwinking, lest the tears run down her cheeks.

"You are wounded, they tell me," continued Sir Hugh.

Miss Pim made a little gesture of dissent. "Oh! so

little; just enough, though, to destroy my power to disappear."

"No one who knows you will ever want you to disappear again," said Sir Hugh, smiling like a happy boy.

And Miss Pim again blushed with joy — joy that after all she had done something "worth while."

"And now I will visit Mère Dupont, as you will have plenty to do if you are going to counter Hindenburg," she said. "It is such a relief to know all those papers are in your hands. I never felt they were safe, in Germany. I was in constant dread lest by some accident they should fall into German hands."

"It would, indeed, have been a calamity; for the certainty we now have that Hindenburg has decided on this course puts us in a splendid position. It will save the lives of thousands of our men."

Mère Dupont expected "ma chère enfant." She gravely kissed her on both cheeks and led her to the salon bedroom. Miss Pim had quite a feeling of coming Home, as she sank down in the fauteuil by the window.

"Madame, you should thank the Bon Dieu that you got back safe, out of the hands of those terrible people," said Mère Dupont, standing calm and abbess-like before Miss Pim.

"Yes, they are a terrible people," replied Perdita

Pim. "They are suffering, but they are not beaten, they are not hopeless."

"Ah, well! That is because they do not realise what is going on," said Madame with calm assurance.

"Food is very scarce and very bad," continued Miss Pim. "The people are doing without those things indispensable to health and the most elementary comfort, actual necessities are failing, such as light, heat, food, and hot water; and yet they hold on."

"But suddenly they will let go," declared Madame, solemnly raising her hand. "Oh! their débâcle is preparing; my only fear is lest they give up before we enter their country. It is necessary that we cross their frontiers as destroyers as well as victors. Madame, do not doubt this. Doubt enfeebles purpose. I am an old woman, I was twenty when the Germans first attacked France. Their success in '70 prepared this war. If we do not break them this time, they will continue through the centuries, either preparing war or waging war, and the nations of the earth will know neither peace nor rest. We must give them such a beating as will destroy their appetite for war, and I have no doubt whatever that we are doing this. Once we enter Germany they will crumple up; we will destroy everything; we French people have vowed that their homes shall be reduced to ruin, because it is the only way to teach the Boche. We

French people will not leave a single factory nor a single machine standing, and this is the meaning of the war, dear Madame; we can only release the world by fighting. So we give our all, our best, our dearest, our sons, our husbands, to save, not France alone, but le monde entier.

"Madame, my boy died in Bois-le-Prêtre in 1915. My grandson died at Verdun in 1916; with them died all which makes life happy or beautiful for me, but I gave ungrudgingly, for a great purpose, and I demand the fulfilment of that purpose; no politicians, no pacifists shall take from us what our sons died to win." Madame's face shone with a spiritual light as she spoke.

Miss Pim jumped up and took both the Frenchwoman's hands.

"The women of England stand with those of France, dear Madame, even in Germany there are men who recognise that Germany's only way of salvation is through defeat. That defeat is inevitable. Germany's man power is failing; soon you will see her totter and fall, as a man falls from loss of blood."

"But in France, and in your country," said Madame severely, "there are dangerous people, who would negotiate with the enemy, and make concessions; and weak, sentimental people, especially in

England, who would spare Germany; and greedy, profit-loving people, who, under the pretence of loving their enemies and forgiving their crimes, hope to trade with them again and make fortunes."

"Yes, there is always that danger," assented Miss Pim, "but I believe the great majority is sane and righteous. In France, too, it will be the same. Nations which have made such tremendous sacrifices are not going to submit tamely to sentimentalists and allow Germany to recover, pick herself up again, and make ready for another war."

"Do you believe wars, in future, can be stopped by a police force of nations?" asked Madame anxiously.

"Force can be met and put down only by greater force," declared Miss Pim. "If the police are armed and united and more numerous than the brigands, they can overcome them, and," she added, with conviction, "you can take it from me, Germany is beaten and her Commander-in-Chief, her Staff, and her Generals know it."

"I heard this morning of your safe return," explained Madame. "One of my officers came round and told me to make ready, and here I am talking instead of seeing to your supper. Will you have it up here or in the salle à manger?"

Miss Pim came down and feasted, and then strolled into the untidy little kitchen garden, and round the

orchard, where she was joined by young officers, eager for news.

"Yes; the Germans are a very hungry people," she assured them, "and the food they get is not only insufficient, it is also injurious to health; hunger is toning down their ferocity, and making them think, and even making them question themselves and their Government. Of course, the soldiers are disciplined and better fed than the civilians, but all are fighting for a cause which they know is lost; they do not believe in victory. They may pretend to, when they are prisoners, but they talk among themselves in *quite* a different tone; despondent is not the word, they are hopeless. Many are resentful; they do not think their artillery supports them at all adequately, and far too many of the German soldiers are looking forward to the chance of becoming prisoners, especially the very young soldiers."

Thus Miss Pim talked with the officers, all sitting along the low orchard wall, in the scented darkness, the perfume of apples and wet grass making the air fragrant; and all the time the guns kept up their shout, "No Peace before Victory!"

"Before leaving France," began an officer, Captain Boyd, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, "would you care to see a French château, lately vacated by the Huns? We arrived too late to save the inmates;

there was a Countess, her son and grandchildren. The son, an officer in the French Army, in the Flying Corps, got leave, and, disguising himself as a French peasant, he managed to fly over the German lines by night and to reach his château. The Boches discovered him. They shot him on the terrace of the house; the grandmother or wife threatened the brutes, though, of course, they were quite helpless; but it was enough for the infuriated Germans, who shot the two women. After that, they ran amuck and killed the little children. We have no actual witness of the murders, but the bodies were found in a heap. One woman in the house fled, after the Count was shot. She heard the old Countess calling out that she would shoot the brigands, and if she failed, the English were approaching and would see justice done. The château is not so very far from here."

Miss Pim hesitated. "It is a very painful sight," she said, "and I ought to be going back."

"Still, you should see for yourself to what depths the German can descend; you ought to let it be known in England, where too many people appear to be under the illusion that we are fighting a decent enemy."

"Were these unfortunate people by any chance called Rochefort?" asked Miss Pim.

"Why, yes. It is the Château de Rochefort, and it

was the Count and his whole family who were murdered. I suppose Mère Dupont told you about it."

Then Miss Pim recounted her adventure in the railway truck from Valenciennes; how she opened a large hamper filled with clothes, etc., and read the letter of a German to his wife, in which he described the butchery at a château, by order of General Wissmann, who carried off all the jewellery, the other officers taking the pictures, plate, and even lace and clothes.

"I hope now you will come to Rochefort," said Captain Boyd, "and see the village notary. The French Government is taking down, on oath, the evidence of all witnesses of atrocities, pillage, theft, etc. You can prove that all the valuables of the castle were carried off, and by whom."

Miss Pim could no longer refuse, and so it was arranged that she should visit the château the next morning.

CHAPTER XXX

"WHAT a perfect summer's day," said Captain Boyd, as he tucked the rug round Miss Pim to keep off the dust, and then climbed in beside her at the wheel. Three officers sat behind, and away the car darted along a fairly rough road, screened by poplars. They met lorries coming in, they passed lorries going out; they saw cottages and farmhouses where sentries were marching up and down; aeroplanes were flitting about overhead like dragonflies sunning themselves. Then, by and by, the happy cultivated land and peaceful green pastures were left behind and they came to the land of Nevermore. Here chaos was king, and his kingdom was desolation; walls with gaping holes, where windows had looked out; doors opening into nothingness; sliding glaciers and avalanches of stones, bricks, and plaster; deep holes dug by shells, — everything had become without shape and void.

"This is the little town of Mont-sur-Val; beyond is Hill 64; and behind that hill is Rochefort. It is n't quite such a ruin; we took them rather by surprise, and they had to run for it or be made prisoners. They blew up a few houses, and had started cutting down the fruit-trees, but, as I say, we tickled them

up, and they decamped. That little hill over there was wooded; now it is just spiked with tree-stumps."

Miss Pim gazed round her with a shudder, the country seemed so permanently ruined. And yet, Captain Boyd assured her, the brave people of France had already commenced to clear the villages. Neat heaps of stones were being piled up on one side; yawning holes were being filled up with rubbish; wounded trees were bound up; and in time the country would be healed and blossom again. But the French people would never forget, and never forgive; the scars on the heart of the Nation were ineffaceable scars.

The Château de Rochefort was situated in a little valley, which seemed an oasis in the surrounding wilderness. The château of grey stone appeared rather small, but it was a perfect sixteenth-century building, of exquisite proportions, with delicate tourelles. It stood in a small courtyard, which was at the same time a terrace, with beautifully carved stone parapets. This terrace overlooked a stream or moat, reached by steps. There was no sign of a flower garden, but green fields and woods gently rose at the back of the château. The car swept through wrought-iron gates, up a short drive, and Miss Pim was received at the entrance by a little group of Frenchmen. She was introduced to Monsieur le Préfet, and Monsieur le Maire, and Monsieur Ribot,

the notary. They were all dressed in very shining black cloth and received Miss Pim in silence, with many bows. The notary was much cheered to find she could speak French. "Yes," he said, talking very fast and eagerly, "you are right; it is a mercy and a miracle that this gem of architecture was spared. But for the arrival of the English, they would have destroyed it. We have evidence that they intended to blow it up. You will see inside how they wrecked it. Madame, it seemed unbelievable, I do assure you, when I came in here, immediately after the miserable wretches had fled. The place looked as though it had been inhabited by powerful and degenerate maniacs. I had every room photographed, but no photograph could convey the horror of the real scene, — the filth, the stench, the destruction, and out there, in front on the terrace, all those bodies. Madame . . . Madame . . ." And the notary threw up his hands, and turned away.

The little procession entered the hall, and the Préfet, before opening one of the tall folding doors of a room, said: "All the rooms have been cleansed and some order restored; you will not, therefore, see this house in the condition in which it was left, but still, Madame, you will see what it really means, when you read: 'General Wissmann and his Staff occupied the Château de Rochefort.'"

Miss Pim now entered a stately old French salon, dignified even in its ruin. The *boiserie*, tinted grey, still panelled the walls, but it was split and slashed, and perforated with bullet-holes; the delicate carvings which enframed charming paintings of cupids and shepherdesses over doors and windows were hacked off, and the pictures hung down in ribbons; every table, chair, and sofa had been deliberately hacked to pieces. The wreckage had been collected and stacked in a corner of the room by the French authorities, after the photographer had taken a picture of the rooms as they were found. Every mirror in the house was starred by pistol-shots. In the children's room the pretty cradle with muslin curtains had been torn to bits, giving an impression that a herd of mad gorillas had disported themselves there. Miss Pim saw the wreckage of a doll's house: six china dolls lay near the nursery fireplace; each doll had been decapitated by a tap on the fender, and the six little china heads lay like marbles beside the six little bodies. Miss Pim knelt down and gathered them up almost reverentially. The baby house had been treated like the château; the tiny chairs and tables, the little cups and dishes had been ground to bits under the German's heel. The image of the Virgin over the children's beds was in many pieces. Miss Pim stood in the middle of the room and looked

round sorrowfully. This pleasant nest of the little ones had been desecrated and torn to pieces in just the same way as had the other apartments, and the nestlings murdered with their parents, down there, on the terrace.

"If Madame will step here, she can read for herself what one of the demons wrote upon the wall," said the Mayor.

And Miss Pim read the following verses written in German over the pale pink-and-white rose-pattern of the wall-paper: —

"When Father comes home,
Comes home from the War,
He'll bring me an Englishman's head,
And we'll put it on high,
And leave it to dry,
And rejoice that the Englishman's dead.

"When Father comes home,
Comes home from the War,
He'll bring me a Frenchman's paw,
So we'll put it on high,
And leave it to dry,
And rejoice that the Frenchman's no more," etc.

"I don't think I can bear to see anything more," said Miss Pim, with the tears running down her cheeks.

"Ah! Madame, think of what the people of Rochefort felt when they entered the château after the

brigands had fled. Madame la Comtesse, who had been the providence of the little village for so many years; and the young Comtesse, who came here not eight years ago, a happy bride; the Comte himself, and his two babes — all murdered. The brutes had first entered the cellars, under the terrace, and, after becoming mad drunk, had poured into the château, with this result!"

Below in the *salle à manger*, Miss Pim was introduced to the wife of Monsieur le Maire, a stout peasant woman in black cashmere, and the wife of the notary, a thin, nervous little woman, also in black, and a rather pretty young woman who had taught the children of the village for three years in the underground cellar of a miller.

On the dining-room table, the only piece of furniture intact, some post-cards were for sale; photographs of the rooms as they were found, and of the poor bodies on the terrace; photographs of the ribald verses on the nursery wall, and the German verses found in an officer's pocket-book: —

"Deutschland, Deutschland over all;
We live to see proud England fall.
Prussian feet shall trample down
Britain's might and Britain's crown.
Our All Highest, Kaiser Lord,
Snatching up the German sword,
Shall by the power of his thrust
Make Britain's people bite the dust;

And all these streams of blood shall run
To win our place under the sun.
We 'll never cease to burn and slay,
Until, at last, we see the Day.
Deutschland, Deutschland over all;
We live to see proud England fall."

The notary now begged Miss Pim to describe what she had seen in the hamper opened by her on the way to Aachen. She described the contents and repeated all she could remember of the letter, and was able to give the writer's name and address in Charlottenburg. After this some sweet wine was handed round in glasses, and Miss Pim turned to Captain Boyd, hoping they would now be able to motor back to Headquarters; but Monsieur le Maire rose and with some ceremony informed Miss Pim and the officers that *déjeuner* had been prepared for them at the house of the notary. The *déjeuner* was a joint affair of the leading people of the village, given at the notary's house because he had the largest *salle à manger*. Captain Boyd was restive, like most English officers, at the prospect of a meal amongst strangers; his knowledge of French was slight and he was quite incapable of carrying on a sustained conversation. Miss Pim saw that he was going to refuse, so she hastened to assure the rather punctilious Maire that she accepted gladly for herself and "ces messieurs."

All the village turned out to stare at the wonderful English going to *déjeuner* at the notary's.

The meal was excellent, cooked to perfection, and bottles of wine, buried at the approach of the Germans, were now produced, and the health of Miss Pim and the British Army was drunk with fervour.

Miss Pim was introduced to a number of old Frenchmen and women who came in solemnly and sat down round the room, watching them as they ate, but taking no part at the festive board.

The notary's wife, Madame Ribot, told Miss Pim that an Englishwoman at Valenciennes had saved many girls carried off by the Germans into the worst kind of slavery. Two of these girls had been taken from Rochefort, and not many days ago these girls had got home safe; the Englishwoman had, so to speak, opened the cage door and bid them fly.

Miss Pim blushed, and was silent, for she was firmly resolved not to betray herself. At this juncture the Mayor opportunely rose, glass in hand, and proposed the toast of "Great Britain, and her King." After that he made a very flowery little speech, and called on Captain Boyd to respond, but this officer, with a malicious glint in his eyes, assured Monsieur le Maire that Miss Pim was the only one of their party who knew French sufficiently well to make a speech.

The *salle à manger*, now inconveniently packed, became vociferous; Miss Pim was cheered, and the Mayor's wife laughed noisily and nudged Miss Pim, who felt quite alarmed. The Captain and the other officers, immensely amused, were just as insistent. Miss Pim felt that it would be best to try and say something; at all events, she might still the clamour, which put her nerves on edge.

As she stood up, silence fell, that silence so alarming to a novice. She looked at the drawn, anxious faces all round her, faces of people who had been forced to live three years under the German heel and who had suffered every sort of deprivation and humiliation.

"My friends," began Miss Pim timidly, "I have seen enough in England and . . . in France to realise what you have suffered; there is hardly a home in these countries which does not mourn for some beloved one. But you who have lived through these terrible years, cut off from France, under the cruel domination of the enemy, surely you have drunk the cup of bitterness to the dregs; nevertheless, you kept unwavering your faith in France and her ally, England; you believed in your deliverance, and it came to you, as it will come to the whole of France and Belgium, as it will come to the whole world, which was truly threatened by the wicked, arrogant Germans.

This blessed deliverance extends to the future, which the Allies will make secure against any recurrence of such an infamous, unprovoked war. America now has joined us. That great-hearted country is preparing to give the flower of her manhood, not only because America is friendly to France, and sorry for France, but for a much bigger idea. She is going to fight for the freedom of the whole world; she gives her youth, her wealth, her energy, her very soul to this great cause. Whilst you were being tortured by the vile enemy, these great plans of deliverance were maturing. We are all groaning and travailing to that end, and the great Dawn, I believe, is at hand, and your eyes shall behold the glory of the Lord; and your children, and your children's children, shall know a happy and abiding peace, won for them by the sons of France, by the dear, courageous English and American boys, and by the fiery, fearless Italians.

"Dear friends, I am proud to see France to-day; she has never been greater, never grander and more entirely admirable; and we English are your brothers and sisters, henceforth and forever."

Miss Pim sat down, feeling much shaken by her emotions, and agitated by her fear of breaking down. The cheers and bravos, however, quite reassured her, and again she turned to Captain Boyd, hoping they might slip away to the car at the château. Nothing

loath, Captain Boyd rose and, bowing to Miss Pim, the Mayor, and the assembled guests, said: "Madames and Mossieurs, moi pense qu'il est le tom pour départir; mon chef attends moi, et un soldat, vous savez, faut être ponctual."

Loud laughter and more applause greeted these brief remarks, in impossible French, of the bronzed young Englishman, and a procession was formed to escort them back to the château, the whole village forming up in fours. Miss Pim walked ahead on the arm of the Mayor, who had begirt himself with his tricolor scarf of office and advanced with much solemnity, almost goose-stepping. The officers walked behind Miss Pim, immensely amused at the whole proceeding.

As they passed a small cottage, a young girl darted out, followed by her mother, and they threw themselves at Miss Pim's feet, lifting the hem of her skirt and kissing it. Miss Pim, much embarrassed, stooped to raise them. The whole procession stopped and closed round the Mayor and Miss Pim. The woman could not explain herself for sobs, but the pretty, delicate girl of fifteen explained that she had recognised in Miss Pim her deliverer of Valenciennes. "We only got back two days ago, Anne-Marie and myself; I was standing there when you passed; Anne-Marie is in bed with swollen feet. I believe all the girls escaped to their homes. We feared you had been

killed; Anne-Marie said they would be sure to kill you. Our mothers thought we were dead, and their joy when they saw us was quite unbelievable."

Anne-Marie's mother was also kissing Miss Pim's hands, and weeping, and many women now began to cry, and Miss Pim was very near tears herself. The Mayor saved the situation by seizing Miss Pim's arm, shouting, "Allons, enfants de la Patrie!"

The crowd re-formed, all singing the "Marseillaise," the two mothers joining at the top of their voices. This absurd procession only stopped at the château gates.

Miss Pim, now breathless with trotting and laughing, her bonnet on one side, her crêpe veil streaming behind her, was thankful to sink down in the car, and the Mayor, begging Captain Boyd to wait a moment, dived into the château, reappearing with a small parcel, hastily wrapped in newspaper. "Un petit souvenir des Boches," he said, putting it on Miss Pim's lap. And then, with hats off, bending low, these village worthies bade farewell to Miss Pim and the officers. When the curve of the road later brought them round to the front of the château, Miss Pim could see the little group on the terrace, waving their arms and their hats.

"An awfully strenuous morning, Miss Pim," said Captain Boyd, putting on speed.

"Yes, it really was, but I would n't have missed it for *anything*."

Carefully opening the parcel on her lap, she found the six little decapitated bodies of the dolls, and the six little china heads, like marbles.

"Even children's toys could not escape the savagery of the Germans. These must be kept in a glass case, labelled and dated, that generations to come may realise what manner of people they are," declared Miss Pim.

On reaching the Hôtel de la Poste, Miss Pim found that further excitements and emotions were in store. A letter from the Commander-in-Chief, in which he begged Miss Pim to hold herself in readiness on the morrow to be presented to General Castaigne, who came from the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army to present Miss Pim with the Croix de la Légion d'Honneur. The ceremony would take place in the Place de la Mairie at two o'clock. Sir Hugh Douglas hoped Miss Pim would make it convenient to be at the Mairie at a quarter to two.

Miss Pim felt quite faint at the prospect. Madame Dupont was most encouraging, and diverted Miss Pim's mind by commenting on her dress, — the bullet-holes must be darned, the Flanders mud must be washed out with petrol. "Mademoiselle Peem" must appear in "comme il faut" mourning, and

make as good an appearance as possible under the circumstances.

The next day, at a quarter to two, Miss Pim, in renovated garments, went timidly over to the Mairie, accompanied by Madame Dupont in severe Sunday best.

The Place de la Mairie was beginning to fill. All round, the soldiers were drawn up, and the civil population was pouring in from all the neighbouring hamlets.

At the Mairie Miss Pim was greeted by the Commander-in-Chief, who looked very cheerful and friendly, and all the Staff came round her eagerly.

"Allow me, Miss Pim, to present to you General Castaigne," said Sir Hugh. And Miss Pim looked up shyly into the face of an old French General, a lean, wrinkled face of the colour of ginger-bread, the darkness of the complexion being enhanced by a large white mustache and close-cropped white hair. He bowed very low, and then jerked back as though pulled by a string.

His black eyes searched Miss Pim's blue eyes, and looked them through.

"C'est incroyable, what Mademoiselle has done; she is bien hardie," he said, turning to Sir Hugh. "Men and women, you English are prodigious. And this is the lady who got into Germany, interviewed

the Kaiser and Hindenburg! Well, it is all very wonderful; how you had the nerve to do it passes me, 'J'y perds mon latin.'"

Sir Douglas then drew the General aside, and the Staff closed round Miss Pim.

"Now, we really ought to hear something of this secret history. We are the initiated, you know. How did Kaiser Bill stand the fright? And Hindenburg? The Chief says old Hindenburg spotted you were there, and when they caught you, you found you *could* not disappear. Some of the Staff here won't believe you ever *did disappear*, they say we were all hypnotized by you. You could n't hold a private séance at the hotel this evening?"

All the young officers talked at once. Miss Pim looked from one to the other, laughing. She was saved the trouble of replying, for at this juncture the band struck up on the Place, "Partant pour la Syrie, le beau et jeune Dunois." Sir Hugh offered his arm to Miss Pim, and led her to the entrance. There, on the top of the steps, she received a tremendous ovation; the English Tommies were enthusiastic and simply "let themselves go."

After Miss Pim came General Castaigne's turn. They then ascended a little platform in the middle of the Place. Sir Hugh made a short, soldierly speech, introducing Miss Pim as a woman of great daring,

who had ventured into the enemy's country and secured important information, thereby saving an incalculable number of English and French lives. They had met there on a very great occasion to witness France doing signal honour to an Englishwoman; General Castaigne would now address them.

The French General rose with a spring and made one of those brief, exquisite speeches, the peculiar gift of the Latin race, and then, turning to Miss Pim, he said in a loud voice, —

"Allow me, in the name of France, to pin this Cross of the Legion of Honour over the heart of a noble and brave Englishwoman."

Miss Pim, pale and cold with emotion, stood facing the old Frenchman, who pinned the cross on her black jacket, and then gave her a resounding kiss on either cheek — on which the Tommies threw up their caps and began singing "For he's a jolly good fellow," and the French sang "Beau jour de fête, belle mariée," and the band played "Tipperary."

An aeroplane swooped low over the Place and dropped great armfuls of roses over Miss Pim and the General. Miss Pim picked up a beautiful La France rose and fastened it herself in the General's tunic, who straightway embraced her again. And Miss Pim, redder than any rose, descended the platform on the arm of the Commander-in-Chief.

At the door of the Mairie she stopped, and said: —

"Sir Hugh, now tell me, when can I return to England?"

"I knew you were eager to return," replied Sir Hugh, "so I have fixed everything up for to-morrow morning. A hospital ship crosses to-morrow afternoon. Being wounded, you are entitled to go on that ship. I will have a letter ready for you to take to Sir Robert Williamson. Carry that letter on you, in some safe place, and, if I may address you as one of my own officers, report yourself at the War Office on arrival. Good-bye until to-morrow. The car will be ready for you at nine."

"Mon Dieu, what a beautiful day it has been!" said Mère Dupont, carrying Miss Pim's bouquet, as they made their way to the Hôtel de la Poste.

Miss Pim, as she sank down in the *fauteuil* in her room overlooking the little kitchen garden, repeated to herself, "Yes! what a beautiful, what a wonderful day! How blessed and privileged you have been, Perdita Pim!" And then her thoughts turned to Keutsick — the brave German who understood his country's needs. Would he ever see "the flaming dawn of Liberty?"

As she gazed out, the sun majestically descended below the horizon in a sea of crimson and gold. Above, the western sky was aflame, and even the

purpling east caught a flush from the glory of that setting.

Miss Pim sat there in meditation until night stole up and overwhelmed the last traces of the sun.

CHAPTER XXXI

"At last! . . . Now for England and home!" Miss Pim said to herself as she stepped on board the great hospital ship. Most of the wounded men were already lying in their white cots, thinking with joy of "Blighty."

Miss Pim felt rather lonely. She had said good-bye to her kind escort, after a delightful luncheon at a first-class restaurant, and here she was, quite alone on this stately ship, without a friend or acquaintance.

"Excuse me, but are you not Miss Pim?" said a pleasant voice.

Miss Pim turned quickly and saw a lady in uniform, with the Red Cross on her arm.

"I am the matron here. We have been expecting you ever so long; indeed, my patients are becoming quite restive. The Commander-in-Chief telegraphed that you were crossing on our ship, and that you are returning to England to receive the V.C. Will you visit the men's ward first? And then the officers? By the way, Colonel Murcott is on board and he wants you to have tea with him."

Miss Pim was indeed delighted. "Tell me," she asked, "is Colonel Murcott very seriously injured?"

"We are afraid that he must lose his left leg, above the knee," said the matron, "but when that is done, the doctors think he will completely recover. Of course the pain has been great and constant, but amputation will stop all that and he will get quite strong again, we hope. All my cases, this voyage, promise well."

The men were very eager to see Miss Pim. She stopped beside each cot, and asked them about their wounds. They were very interested to see the Croix d'Honneur.

"Ah! you are going to Blighty for the Victoria Cross!" said one boy with a bandaged head. "I shall wear *my* decoration all my life, under the left eye."

The matron then led Miss Pim to the officers' quarters. Some were lying flat, looking very pale, in very white cots; others sat up, with bandaged arms or bandaged heads. Miss Pim came to Colonel Murcott's bed, where he sat propped up with pillows, his leg covered by a cradle.

Miss Pim would not have recognised the pale, drawn face and sunken eyes, four days of acute suffering had left so deep an impress on that handsome countenance.

"My deliverer! At last!" — and a hot nervous hand grasped hers. "Now, this is too wonderful, both going to Blighty together; but for you, I should have

been tortured and killed by the Germans. I am to have the privilege of giving you tea here — or rather you will give me tea, whilst I look at your soothing face. Do you know — seeing you has eased the pain already. Miss Pim, I believe I could write a good article on pain. Do you remember, when last I saw you, I said that pain once past could not be remembered. Well, I think, I almost think, I shall remember this pain. I feel as though it could never be effaced; it has engaged my whole attention since it occurred; since I was smashed up it has been so insolent, so insistent, so damned German, — do you think pain like this can ever be forgotten? The one thing which relieves me is the thought of this leg coming off. I wish they had taken it off at the dressing-station. You see what this beastly business has reduced me to, talking of myself, and this unpleasant subject of pain. I am really ashamed of myself; you must put it down to the fact that I am only half, no, only a quarter, of my original self. I have lost my balance, and small wonder! A one-legged chap has n't much balance till he gets to crutches — but don't look so woe-begone, it does n't suit you one bit. You are to look normal, to look your steady, calm, even self, and I shall feel better and better as I look at you. Ah! here's the tea, and all manner of good things."

Over the tea and toast, the jam and biscuits, Miss

Pim told him her adventures, and really succeeded in diverting his mind from the aching nerves.

"Tell me now," said Colonel Murcott, smiling, "how you got through to our trenches, even invisible; it must have been terribly risky."

"But I was not invisible," Miss Pim replied with a sigh, as she recalled that awful experience. "I think the bullet which grazed my neck somehow disturbed the particular adjustment or balance which enabled me to become invisible; anyhow, the power has left me."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Colonel Murcott, clasping his hands. "You crossed that ground visible, knowing you were a particularly good target! Really! Your nerves must be of steel! You are truly amazing!"

"Not a bit of it," said Miss Pim, shaking her head; "I was as frightened as a rabbit. But enough of Perdita Pim; I want to hear many things about the future. Are you anything of a prophet?"

"Yes . . . when I know," replied the Colonel, lighting a cigarette.

"Well, then, about the Americans? I have misgivings," said Miss Pim.

"Misgivings! Surely not about the American Army? Why! as fighters they are second to none in the world, and I know what I am talking about," said the

Colonel, propping himself on his elbow and talking eagerly. "Now, really, Miss Pim, have you ever read anything about the American Civil War? No? I thought not. But you have heard, of course, of Grant, Lee, Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and many others. I tell you those *were* Men. If you look at photographs of the time, officers and men of the Northern and Southern armies, you cannot fail to be struck by the nobility and power depicted on those faces. The American soldier of to-day is every bit as splendid. Heavens! how I wish I could go back to the Front, and fight side by side with the Yanks! Misgivings, indeed!" And the Colonel thumped his pillow.

"But . . . they . . . don't really like us," said Miss Pim, hesitatingly. "And you remember those lines beginning, 'I did n't raise my boy to be a soldier.' That is not a warlike spirit."

Colonel Murcott laughed, and, with a twinkle in his eye, said: "Miss Pim, don't you know that that was what the Kaiser said when he heard of little Willie's successive defeats at Verdun? The true American feeling is shown in the revised version: —

"It's time for every boy to be a Soldier,
To put his strength and courage to the test.
It's time to place a musket on his shoulder,
And wrap the Stars and Stripes around his breast.

It's time to shout those noble words of Lincoln,
And stand up for the land that gave you birth.
That the Nation 'of the people, by the people,
For the people, shall not perish from the earth.'

As for the Anti-English spirit in America, the Irish-Americans and the German-Americans are alone responsible. But this war is going to make us known to each other. The Americans are beginning to realise what that sort of Irish really are, and what we British really are; we shall soon become 'blood-brothers,' as they say in Africa."

At this juncture a nurse came down to say that the cliffs of England were in sight, and that she must prepare her patient for the hospital train.

"I will write and tell you where I shall be, — somewhere in London, — and perhaps you will come and see me?" said Colonel Murcott.

Miss Pim assured him that she would pay him a weekly visit, and they parted regretfully.

Miss Pim went up on deck, and saw the cliffs growing bigger and clearer. "Beloved country!" she whispered to herself, "buttressed by those white walls. Dear England, it is for you all those glorious English boys are fighting and dying."

. . . . . .

And here Miss Pim's adventures end. We all know how she was acclaimed and honoured in England.

How she received the Victoria Cross from His Majesty King George V, at Buckingham Palace, in recognition of her great services to the country, and the extraordinary courage she had shown.

The newspapers were full of it, the only thing wanting was Miss Pim's portrait in the picture papers, and reports of interviewers, describing Froghurst Manor, and "Miss Pim At Home"; but she was of a modest and retiring disposition, and refused to allow her kindly, average face to appear in the papers or to grant interviews to flattering pressmen.

This true history would not be complete did I not mention that some ten days after her return, Miss Pim read in the "Times" the following, from the "North-German Gazette": —

The well-known Professor Keutsick, once a pronounced Socialist, has just died at the front; recognising the folly of his earlier views, he threw up journalism. He was attached to the machine-gun corps. He chose it because he knew it was a weapon given to Germany by Almighty God and the War Council to destroy the British in thousands; indeed, Professor Keutsick was so attached to his gun he could not be persuaded to leave it, but was found dead beside his well-loved gun in the very first line of trenches.

The same day Miss Pim received a letter from the Foreign Office: —

Madam: —

We are requested by an agent of ours in Germany to send you the enclosed, which we decoded. Should you wish

to send the writer a reply we shall be very pleased to transmit it.

Miss Pim read the following: —

Charming and accomplished lady: —

I knew, by our prearranged signal, that you had succeeded, and I have heard since that you secured *the* correspondence, and caused the most terrible commotion. You are a very wonderful woman; it seems a great pity that two such remarkable people as myself and yourself should live apart. Will you become my wife on the termination of this war? I have extensive lands in Silesia. I would spend six months of the year in your country and you would spend the other six months in my feudal castle. I lay my heart at your feet.

THE BARON.

Miss Pim smiled; she really could not help being amused. She wrote a short note to the Foreign Office acknowledging the receipt of the decoded letter, and added: "There is no reply."

Lesley, of course, was delighted to have her aunt back; the wedding was to take place in a fortnight, and there was much to think of and decide. Miss Pim was glad to find Lesley entirely taken up with her own affairs, and so Auntie Purr escaped all awkward questions.

"Every one says you were wonderful," remarked Lesley, her head on one side, trying to decide which shade of Bleu Saxe would suit her best for a "going-away" dress.

"But," she continued, "as I said to George, no one who *really* knew you could believe you would do anything wonderful. Now, if only George had been sent, what might he not have achieved! Backed as you were by the War Office, not counting the Commander-in-Chief himself, Auntie Purr, you can't deny it, you had phenomenal luck!"

But Miss Pim did not hear Lesley; she was listening to a voice — was it her father's? — saying — "Well done, my little Perdita Pim, V.C."

THE END

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